

Region 3 Regional Prosperity 10 Year Plan

Region 3 Regional Prosperity Initiative Collaborative, having developed a 5 year RPI plan in 2014, decided to develop a 10 year plan, an updated and responsive plan to continue the work of the 5 year plan but also to adapt to the new economy as well as new opportunities. The RPI Collaborative is made up of private, public and non-profit partners from the region who strive to support a vibrant and resilient economy in the 11 county region in Northeast Lower Michigan. This collaborative effort has identified assets and challenges in the region and is looking to support a vision for long-term, sustained growth and strategically supporting regional and sub-regional priorities.

Region 3 is a very large geographical area including 11 counties. In 2016, the region identified three (3) distinct sub-regions or corridors. Due to the large size of the Region 3 RPI area, identifying these 3 sub-regions allows more specific plans and priorities to develop that best meet their unique needs and resources. The three sub regions are 1) Coastal (including Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Alpena, Alcona and Iosco); 2) Interior (also called the M-33/M-65 Corridor – including Montmorency, Oscoda, and Ogemaw); and 3) I-75 (including Otsego, Crawford and Roscommon).

Regional meetings were held in the fall of 2016 in each of the three sub regions. Input sessions were held in 1) I-75 Corridor - Grayling at Kirtland Community Colleges new Health Science campus on 4 Mile Road and in West Branch; 2) Comins, MI at the Skyline Regional Events Center; 3) Coastal – Alpena and Cheboygan at the Michigan Works! Centers. An additional meeting was held in Gaylord with the RPI Collaborative. Widespread frustration finding quality employees was top of the list in priorities. As a result of this common, critical theme, it was decided to make Talent and Workforce Development a major component of this 10 year plan. In order to professional and adequately address this issue, Strategic Policy Consultants were retained to explore needs, opportunities and recommendations for this 10 year plan.

Discussions with regional partners and local businesses, helped to identify a major issue and challenge for Region 3 – Talent and Workforce Development. As a result of these discussions, Strategic Policy Consultants were retained, as experts in this area, to develop the talent and workforce content for this plan. Talent and Workforce Development are considered the primary and critical component of this plan, without which, other economic plans may be far less successful.

There were common issues that arose that are common across the larger region and these are the core, foundational areas of focus recommended for the 10 year RPI plan:

- 1) Building Collaboration in Region 3
 - a. Boardmanship training for all levels of boards: Commissioners, School Boards, Township Boards, Zoning Boards, Health Dept. Boards, etc... (Yr1-3,4-6, 7-10)
 - b. Training and awareness of benefits to local and regional coordination and collaboration –both short and long-term. (yr1-3,4-6,7-10)
 - i. Benefits of Collaboration, Communication and Cooperation-
 - ii. Explore annual plans that promote regional collaboration

- iii. Discussion at local level as well as RPI level on why this works and benefits the region and local plan – explore other plans and have speakers come in to assist
 - c. Develop a Young Professional Group(s) in the region, link to others (yr 1-3)
 - i. Have ongoing discussions with young professionals, include in planning
 - ii. Look at more local groups and annual or semiannually meet together
 - d. Discuss and develop a plan for the RPI collaborative to get the word out, inform critical partners in the region – Commissioners, School Boards, Zoning Boards, Township Boards, Service Clubs (yr1-3)
 - e. Create a Committee within the RPI and the Region that proactively pursues all potential linkages for collaboration, identifying where information or training is needed, advocate for collaborative planning and implementation (yr 1-3)
 - i. Create subcommittees within RPI. Have committees meet first hour of RPI meetings, then report out last hour of RPI meeting.
 - f. Adopt an agreement from all counties and partners to proactively work to build collaboration, develop local/regional plans for growth, talent, etc... (yr1-3)
 - g. Meet with other RPI Collaboratives in other regions to identify critical policy issues that can collectively advocated to the state, regional or federal agencies. These are critical policies that inhibit growth or development or are limiting training, broader education opportunities or are barriers to regional growth.(Yr 1-3, 4-6)
- 2) Affordable and available Daycare (see Talent 10 Year Plan)
 - a. Lack of Daycare impacts workforce
 - b. Explore Cooperative Daycare
 - i. Small businesses or communities an establish a cooperative daycare to serve daycare needs
 - ii. Larger businesses may offer to employees, create an employee benefit (would need to consider other benefits or compensation for those who do not need daycare)
- 3) Affordable Housing
 - a. Consider Low/Mod Housing
 - b. Inventory housing in development areas. (yr 1-3, yr 4-6, yr 7-10)
 - c. Assess need for housing, types of housing (yr1-3)
- 4) Infrastructure
 - a. Expand Broadband and internet availability to entire region (ongoing, develop annual plan to assure all areas of region are covered)
 - b. Explore prioritizing low population areas
 - c. Expand Cellular coverage
 - i. Work with Cellular companies and maps showing coverage areas (or lack of coverage areas)
 - ii. Identify growth areas, residential and business, and potential areas for growth to meet demand
- 5) Tourism
 - a. Create tourism priorities for the 3 identified sub-regions and develop plans

- i. River Trails
 - ii. Trails – hiking, biking, walking, ATV, horse
 - iii. Heritage
 - iv. Lighthouse
- 6) Transportation
 - a. Explore new business types that utilize regional transport assets – ports
- 7) Talent/Workforce Development
 - a. Top issue from all sectors and all meetings.
 - b. Critical shortage of competent employees
 - c. Annually explore potential growth areas and needed training
 - d. See Talent 10 Year Plan for detailed report and recommendations
 - e. Periodic surveys of high school graduates, young professionals and millennials to assess region 3 attractiveness; barriers; their needs for housing, work, leisure time activities.
- 8) Identify and develop sub-regional strategies for three sub-regions based on regional collaborative priorities as well as unique needs and opportunities within each sub-region.
- 9) Focus on Core Industries and develop annual plans for each
 - a. Wood Industry
 - i. Work with Industry associations and professionals to identify needs and coordinate plans. (yr1-3)
 - ii. Identify opportunities for funding and support (i.e. M-33 Corridor) (yr1-3)
 - b. Agriculture
 - i. Collaboration with Taste the Local Difference, Michigan Agritourism Association, Center for Regional Food Systems to highlight local agriculture and potential growth areas (yr1-3)
 - ii. Discuss with healthcare and health departments – potential to link ag and healthcare – explore current models (yr1-3,4-6)
 - c. Tourism
 - i. Expand and continue to support existing tourism opportunities (ongoing)
 - ii. Work with Tourism Boards across region to continue to identify new areas of interest from tourists and visitors to region (yr1-3)
 - d. Healthcare
 - i. Initiate discussion with healthcare industry on needs and growth in this area (yr1-3)
 - ii. Support and promote managed healthcare through hospitals, health care clinics, doctors and specialist in region (yr1-3)
 - iii. Initiate discussion with nursing home and residential care facilities as to needs and growth potential for region. (yr1-3, 4-6)

Goals

- 1) Attract and retain a talent workforce (see Talent 10 Year Plan)
- 2) Improve Infrastructure connectivity and affordability

- 3) Encourage and foster collaboration, communication and cooperation across the region based on core principles and identified priorities
- 4) Grow a diversified and resilient economy based addressing critical needs and existing assets.

Summary

The overall focus of Region 3 RPI 10 year plan is on Talent and Workforce Development. If the region is to grow and maintain a healthy economy, a talented and available workforce must be in place. One common issue across the region was the difficulty in finding quality, stable employees with basic soft skills. Simultaneously, a vibrant atmosphere for supporting existing and new businesses must be available throughout the region. Supporting entrepreneurial businesses and individuals is critical; all components in the policy and regulatory system must be aware and participating. This calls for discussions at local levels to identify bottle necks or barriers that exist or are perceived.

Successful community and economic development and growth depend on strong coordination between workforce/talent, and proactive policies and plans. Region 3 should proactively work to develop annual plans with specific actions to tie these two critical initiatives.

A source of support at local levels to assist in executing these plans, are the many Service Clubs throughout the region. Service Clubs are made up of active business owners and other active leaders in their communities. They need to be aware of these plans and offered opportunities to participate. They are powerful advocates and have critical awareness of local issues, as well as their connections throughout the community. Given the larger, regional tools and plans, they can adapt to their local needs.

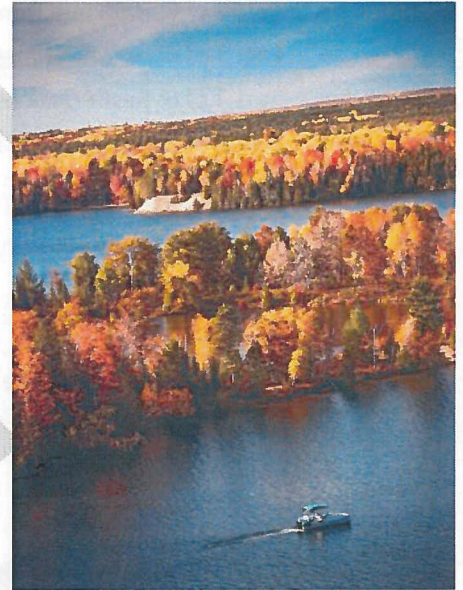
Region 3 has an aging population that becoming a larger percentage of the overall population. This may be, in part, to the quality of life and affordability of NE Lower Michigan. Recognizing this trend, but understanding the need to maintain a diverse population, discussions should be held throughout the region to explore opportunities to develop economies around this trend. At the same time, balancing the need to have the quality of life and expectations of younger professionals is critical. Inclusion of young professionals and millennials in discussions, and getting their input and feedback is crucial. Evolving plans for communities that are inclusive of these voices will help to pave the path for diverse and stable growth in population and thus workforce.

NORTHEAST MICHIGAN RPI: 10-YEAR TALENT PLAN

The 11-county region of Northeast Michigan holds many assets that are the envy of urban areas across the world. A small community feel, numerous recreation opportunities, plentiful fresh water, and picturesque national forests are just a few of the assets that create a high quality of life for residents of Region 3. These place-based assets are complemented by a multitude of opportunities for attracting and developing a quality workforce, something very much needed by area employers.

Business is thriving in Region 3. Companies are growing and hiring, but often report that they cannot find the skilled workers they seek. This issue has worsened in the past few years, and the situation will grow more severe in the coming years, especially for high growth industries.

The region faces several challenges to attracting and developing skilled talent, including lower than average wages, decreasing population, and lack of soft skills. These challenges are not unique to the region, but the region possess unique assets that can overcome these issues and position the area to grow a pipeline of highly qualified, skilled workers for the near future.



Since finding skilled talent is one of the region's most important challenges, the Regional Prosperity Initiative Collaborative has focused a significant portion of its 10-year Regional Prosperity Plan on how best to attract and develop skilled talent. The goal of the collaborative is to find ways to positively impact talent development efforts.

This report provides the information and resources needed to make those positive impacts. The report first reviews the workforce climate of the region, then explores best practices from around the state and country. With these in mind, several proven strategies are recommended for effective development of a skilled workforce and viable business community. The primary recommendation offers a suggested region-wide Vision that will give all parties a common, long-term goal. The recommended strategies that will help to

achieve that goal are presented in three primary categories: Talent Attraction, Talent Development, and Entrepreneurship. These three categories are connected via the common theme of *Experience* – whether it’s identifying experiences of millennials in the region or focusing on experiential learning. Included with each set of recommendations are goals, outcomes and metrics; a ten-year implementation timeline; and some suggested action steps for getting started.

The report is presented in six sections, as separate documents for easy reference. They are as follows:

- Part 1 of 6: Executive Summary
- Part 2 of 6: Data and Demographics
- Part 3 of 6: Assets, Challenges and Key Economic Indicators
- Part 4 of 6: Best Practices
- Part 5 of 6: Recommendations
- Part 6 of 6: Resources

This report was developed by the Janie McNabb and Sara Wycoff McCauley of Strategic Policy Consultants.



Executive Summary

The typical gauge for economic improvement and the prosperity it brings is related to employment. Plentiful opportunities for work in living wage occupations, along with a skilled workforce to fill those positions, can make the ultimate difference in a region's vitality. However, it takes a strong network of community support, viable strategies, and common visioning to ensure that employment opportunities are available and sustainable for the long-term.

In our ever-changing economy, the most successful regions will adequately plan for long-term growth, anticipating industry trends and their educational needs. Region 3's recovery from the recession lags behind other areas of the state, but is significantly impacting the businesses here. They are in dire need of skilled workers now, and are looking ahead to future workforce needs caused by growth and impending retirements. The planning necessary to successfully meet those needs is being led by the Regional Prosperity Initiative Collaborative, and will be implemented by a mix of public workforce agencies, economic development entities, educational institutions, Career and Technical Education, and numerous supportive service providers. These entities, through collaboration and cooperative effort, are positioned to make significant positive impact on talent development in Region 3.

The Northeast Michigan RPI 10-Year Talent Plan is a comprehensive report that explores the talent climate of the region. Through prolific research, community conversations, stakeholder interviews, and brainstorming, the consultants have developed a set of strategic recommendations for improving talent activities in the region.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the five primary sections of the full report: Northeast Michigan RPI 10-Year Talent Plan. Each section summarizes the corresponding section in the full report, and provides a "quick reference."

Data & Demographics

The following data points are most relevant to the talent system in the region. They indicate potential assets and challenges, and areas of opportunity.

- The **population** of the region is low and has low density, at 203,164ⁱ people spread across 6,430 square miles.
- The area is **aging**, with more than 35% of the population aged 60 or higher.ⁱⁱ This trend will continue.

- **Unemployment rates** have significantly improved, dropping from 15.3% in 2010 to 5.6% in July 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The **poverty rate** is high at 17.3%. Families whose household income is lower than the cost of living is 42.8%.^{iv}
- Wages are the lowest in Michigan, with a **median wage** of \$13.65 per hour.
- **Educational attainment** is low, with 51% of the adult population having earned a high school diploma or less.^v **College drop-out rate** is high, at 27.5%.^{vi}
- **Cost of living** is low, especially for housing (\$7,760 annually for a family of 4),^{vii} compared to other rural regions and large metropolitan areas.

Growth Industries

The following data shows changes in employment by industry from 2012 to 2022. Although this timeframe does not align with this Talent Plan, the trends are expected to continue in much the same way.

Recommendations for developing talent should focus on the highest growth industries that offer the most full-time, higher wage positions. These include Healthcare and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, and Professional and Business Services.

Industry	Employment 2012	Employment 2022	Percent Change
Retail Trade	10,960	10,860	-0.9%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	9,560	10,212	6.8%
Transportation and Warehousing	1,460	1,630	11.6%
Manufacturing	5,170	5,420	4.8%
Construction	2,380	2,780	16.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1,790	1,850	3.4%
Professional and Business Services	2,320	2,620	12.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	6,410	6,860	7.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	7,530	8,040	6.8%
Government	6,270	6,090	-2.9%
Financial Activities	2,320	2,360	1.7%

Talent Assets

The following assets are of critical importance to successful efforts in talent attraction and retention. These should be leveraged to create effective strategies.

- **Michigan Works! Agencies** and their programs help people across the region to obtain the skills needed to fill open jobs, and help companies to hire the best candidates.
- The **Talent District Career Council** brings together the education, workforce development, and private sectors for collaborative planning and discussion.
- The region's **blue-collar, patriotic culture** is a welcoming place for families who value individual freedoms and the traditional American spirit.
- **Career and Technical Education** programs train young people with the vocational skills most in-demand by the area's employers.
- **Occupational, Postsecondary, and Adult Education training programs** train adults with the vocational skills most in-demand by the area's employers.
- The region offers a **high quality of life** combined with **low cost of living**, which is difficult to find in the state or country.
- Industry sectors, including the **wood products cluster** and a **growing healthcare industry** offer many opportunities for talent attraction, development, and business growth.
- Multiple partners have been engaging in **career awareness opportunities** for young people.
- The region's **transportation infrastructure** allows for easy commutes across the region and to larger cities in the state.
- The National Guard's **Camp Grayling Military Training Center** is a source of pride and significant economic activity in the region.

Talent Challenges

The following challenges act as potential barriers to talent attraction and development efforts. The recommended strategies in this report work to overcome these challenges.

- The **working age population is decreasing**, and the **retirement age is increasing**, making it difficult to fill open positions in the region.
- Employers often cite a **lack of soft skills** as a primary contributor to their difficulties in finding the right talent.
- The region's **low educational attainment** makes it less appealing for companies who may be looking to locate here.
- The region's **low wages** and **part-time positions** make it less appealing for skilled talent who may be looking to locate here.
- Quality **childcare is difficult to find**, especially for infants and second shift timeframes.

- **Business support organizations lack the capacity** to cover the full region and meet demand.
- The region lacks an embracing, encouraging **entrepreneurial culture**.

Best Practices

The following best practices are highlighted because of their relevance to the region. Many of these initiatives are successfully overcoming similar challenges, leveraging similar assets, and are set in rural regions.

Talent Attraction Best Practices

- [MyNorth](#), the official Live-Work-Play web site of Northwest Michigan: This site feeds in local job postings, features cool companies, and highlights great things about the region.
- [Stormy Kromer Ambassadors](#): These individuals represent the brand and promote both the products and lifestyle via blogs and social media.
- [Great Minnesota Rising](#): This region took the time to thoroughly understand the millennial generation living there.
- [Traverse City Young Professionals](#): This group has two programs that connect new millennials with professional and personal networks in the area.

Talent Development Best Practices

- [Healthcare Roundtable, Upward Talent Council](#): This healthcare sector partnership collaborates on talent attraction and development activities.
- [Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board](#): This manufacturing sector partnership works with local schools to upgrade equipment and expand training opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed.
- [Transitioning Adults to Postsecondary Education and Training](#): This career pathways program helps adult learners who earn their GED to effectively transition to postsecondary training.
- [Get Into Energy](#): This career pathways program provides “roadmaps” as a long-term career planning tool.
- [West Michigan Medical Assistant Apprenticeship](#): This non-traditional apprenticeship program in the Medical Assistant occupation was created as a result of a sector convening and collaborative program development.
- [Great Lakes Bay Employer Resource Network](#): This Employer Resource Network partners with the Community Ventures program to offer long-term, sustainable individuals with barriers to employment.
- [GOOD Training Program](#): This work experience program integrates soft skills training into the day-to-day work experience.

- [Roca](#): This transitional jobs program in Boston teaches employability skills to young men, most of whom have been incarcerated.

Entrepreneurship Best Practices

- [The Innovation Collaborative](#): This regional collaborative builds awareness about the importance of entrepreneurship and connects aspiring entrepreneurs to resources.
- [The Diamond Challenge Youth Entrepreneurship Summit](#): This major event at the University of Delaware is the culmination of a student competition, and also convenes and energizes the community around entrepreneurship.
- [Oscoda County Achieves](#): This program, local to Region 3, combines Junior Achievement curriculum with the goodwill and partnership of local volunteers, an energetic coordinator, and willing school districts to teach young people about entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

The recommendations are summarized here, and explored in more detail in the Recommendations section of the full report.

Vision

Our first recommendation is to establish a common vision that will catalyze the region toward achieving the goals in the rest of the plan. We recommend developing your own, or utilizing the following vision statement:

FILL 10,000 GOOD JOBS IN 10 YEARS

A “good” job is defined as full-time, permanent, and paying \$14 per hour or more. This vision will help the region to increase the median wage, attract skilled talent, better develop the talent of individuals living here, and encourage entrepreneurship.

Talent Attraction Recommendations

Start by **creating a subcommittee of the Regional Prosperity Initiative Collaborative** to oversee the recommended strategies for Talent Attraction.

Recommendation: Target an audience of skilled workers who desire the lifestyle offered by Northeast Michigan.

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Better understand the millennials who live in the	Conduct three focus groups	Year one

region.		
Develop local ambassadors to promote the region.	Appoint ten local ambassadors	Years one and two
Create talent attraction promotional tools for businesses and communities.	Create a package of tools	Year one, refine and add through year three
Develop more Young Professionals groups	Establish YP groups in all major population centers	Years two through five
Promote innovative and successful companies headquartered in the region.	Create ten “features” to promote on local news or online	Year three
Take it on the road.	Attend three events per year to promote the region	Year four and five

Talent Development Recommendations

Start by engaging the Talent District Career Council to take on the role of overseeing this portion of the plan. Suggest that they create a subcommittee for this purpose.

Recommendation: Conduct Talent Development activities using a sector-based approach

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Establish sector partnership groups in priority industry clusters.	Select three industries of focus	Year one
- Healthcare	Establish a sector partnership in the healthcare industry	Year one or two
- Wood Products	Establish a sector partnership in the wood products industry	Year one or two
Ensure strong connections between workforce development boards and sector partnerships.	Both workforce development boards will have representation from the top three industries of focus	Year three

Recommendation: Increase utilization of USDOL Registered Apprenticeships

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Promote USDOL Registered Apprenticeships to local employers.	Create and implement a robust promotional plan	Years one and two
Create a centralized coordination function for USDOL Registered Apprenticeships	Hire a coordinator	Year two

Ensure long-term, ongoing support for employers and apprentices	Develop a system of support that includes wrap-around services and funding to maintain the coordinator position	Years four and five
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Recommendation: Develop comprehensive Career Pathways systems within sector partnerships

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Create career pathways “roadmaps.”	Create a roadmap for each sector partnership industry	Years one and two
Develop training programs where gaps exist.	If needed	Year two
Promote Adult Education services as an entry into career pathways.	Create a marketing plan that emphasizes career pathways	Year one
Develop an Employer Resource Network (ERN).	Create an ERN with willing partners	Years four and five

Recommendation: Improve soft skills through Work-Based Training

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Build soft skills training into the structure of work experience programs.	Develop training elements and plan for integration	Year one
Train work experience supervisors.	Conduct one training session per year	Years two through ten
Increase the quantity of work experience placements.	Recruit 50 additional businesses to take work experience placements	Years three through ten.

Entrepreneurship Recommendations

Start by creating a **Regional Entrepreneurial Collaborative** to oversee these recommendations and strategies. Convening and establishing a group such as this will in itself begin to build the infrastructure needed to improve entrepreneurial culture in the region.

Recommendation: Increase awareness about entrepreneurship.

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Hold an entrepreneurship summit.	Hire a facilitator to plan the event; host the summit	Years one and two
Develop an “entrepreneurial success” campaign.	Develop the campaign plan; implement the campaign	Years two through ten
Conduct “pitch” events throughout the region.	Develop a plan for the events; conduct events in every major population center once per year	Years four through ten

Recommendation: Increase entrepreneurial programming for youth.

Strategies	Goals	Timelines
Partner with an established program to deliver entrepreneurial programming for youth.	Select a program and begin implementation	Years two through ten

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End Notes

ⁱ Annual Planning Information Report, Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives (MBLMISI), 2015.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Workforce Analysis Report, MBLMISI, 2016.

^{iv} ALICE Report for Michigan, United Way, 2014.

^v Workforce Analysis Report for Northeast Michigan, MBLMISI, 2016.

^{vi} "Michigan's College Drop-outs;" MAP: College Drop-out Rates by County, Bridge, 2016.

^{vii} Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016.

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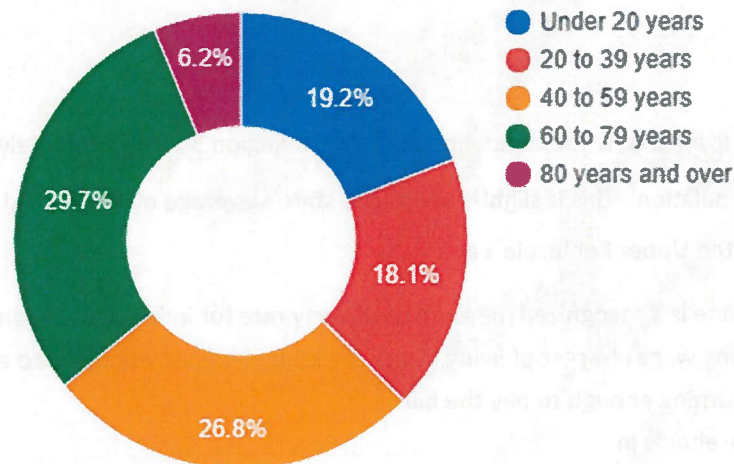
DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The data included in this section provides a thorough understanding of the talent environment in the Northeast Prosperity Region. The statistics shared here indicate both weaknesses and areas of opportunity for attraction and development a skilled workforce.

Population and Age Cohorts

From 2009 to 2015, Region 3 lost 2.4% of its population. The distribution of this population loss is important to note: most of it occurred in the working age population of 25 to 54, while there was an increase in population for older and retirement age residents.¹

2016 Age Cohort Distribution



Currently, the distribution of ages is heavily weighted to an older population, with the largest cohort being 60 to 79 years of age. This trend is projected to continue from 2016 to 2026, with a projected overall decrease in population of **2.0%**.² Reductions occurring in the working age cohorts will be approximately 13%, while the number of individuals of retirement age will increase by 21.8%. This obviously presents significant challenges for the region: there will be more people in need of goods and services who are no longer working, with fewer people in the workforce to meet the demand.

¹ Workforce Analysis Report for Northeast Michigan, Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives (MBLMISI), 2016.

² Networks Northwest, 2016.

Unemployment

The average unemployment rate in 2010 was 15.3% for the 11-county region. This has improved significantly, with the July 2016 unemployment rate falling to **5.6%**. As of September, county unemployment rates are even better: Cheboygan County has the lowest in the region, at 3.6%, and the highest is in Roscommon County at 5.9%.³

The unemployment rate typically tracked by local, state, and federal sources is one of six standardized measures held by the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. Other measures look at discouraged workers, marginally attached workers, and those working part-time who would prefer full-time. Collectively, these categories are sometimes referred to as the “underemployed” - individuals who could be working at higher wage, permanent positions but can’t obtain those jobs. Unfortunately, no reliable source can provide a local “underemployment rate” – this is only provided at a national level. However, given the low unemployment rate combined with higher than average poverty rate (see below), it is a fair assumption that underemployment is a challenge in Region 3.

Poverty

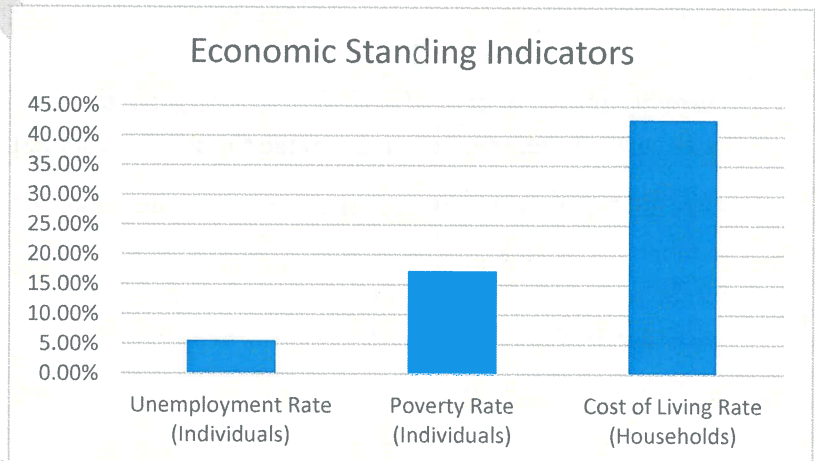
The number of individuals living below the federal poverty line in Region 3 is approximately 35,608, or **17.3%** of the overall population. This is slightly above the state’s average of 16.2%, and is also higher than Northwest’s at 13.2% and the Upper Peninsula’s at 16.3%.⁴

While the federal poverty line is a recognized measure of poverty rate for individuals, it can also be misleading. When comparing wages to cost of living, there are many families who fall into an unseen gap; they are working but not earning enough to pay the bills.

There are 90,814 total households in

Region 3; 38,942 (**42.8%**) of them earn an income below the local cost of living. This is significantly higher than Region 2’s rate of 38.1% and slightly higher than Region 1’s rate of 40.8%.⁵

Wages



³ Workforce Analysis Report for Northeast Michigan, MICHIGAN, 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ALICE Report for Michigan, United Way, 2014.

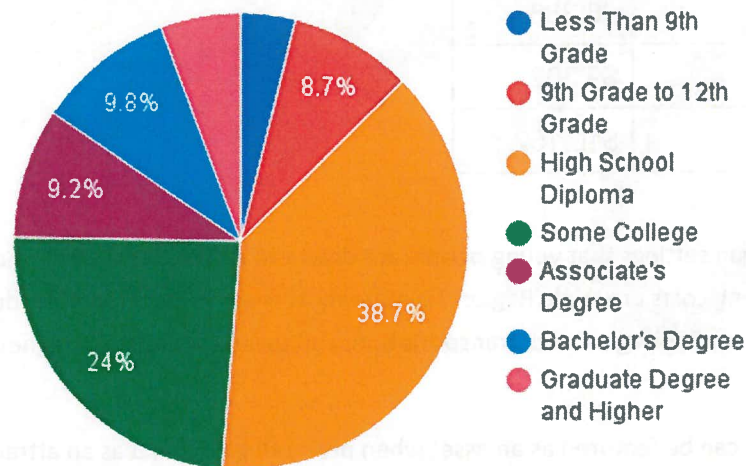
The median hourly wage for jobs in Region 3 during 2015 was **\$13.65**, which is significantly lower than the state of Michigan's at \$17.05. It is also lower than Northwest and the Upper Peninsula, which median wages of \$15.10 and \$15.22 respectively. In fact, Region 3 has the lowest median wages of any area in the state. The range of hourly wages starts at a low of \$8.79 (10th percentile) and reaches a high of \$30.35 (90th percentile).⁶

Despite these lower wages in 2015, there appears to be an overall increase in wages of new job postings. This information can be difficult to track, since many companies prefer not to publicly divulge their rate of pay when recruiting. However, a quick scan of job postings on [Pure Michigan Talent Connect](#) for various locations throughout Region 3 shows a wide range of positions, from low to highly skilled, with wages that match. In addition, most stakeholders anecdotally state that the more desirable positions with long-term family-sustaining wages are on the rise. It's also these positions that are most difficult to fill, due to the specialized training and credentials required.

Educational Attainment

Many of the higher wage jobs require some postsecondary training. The educational attainment of Region 3 is low compared to other similar regions and the state. More than half the population - **51%** - has achieved only a high school diploma or less. Regions 1 and 2 have 47% and 40% respectively, which indicate that their populations have higher levels of education.⁷

Region 3 Educational Attainment, 2016



⁶ Workforce Analysis Report for Northeast Michigan, MBLMISI, 2016.

⁷ Ibid.

In addition, college dropout levels are high, with five of the region’s 11 counties at 27.5% dropout rate or higher ([see a map here](#)).⁸ The low levels of educational attainment in Region 3 make the location less appealing to new business, and limit growth of companies within the region due to lack of needed skill sets.

Cost of Living

While wages may be on the low end in Region 3, so are costs. Most experts agree on the standard measures for cost of living: food, housing, transportation and taxes among others. While costs for food, transportation, and taxes are similar to other rural areas in Michigan, housing costs are significantly lower. Below is a listing of housing costs averaged from a sample of counties in Region 3, as compared to counties in other rural areas (Regions 1 and 2) as well as urban areas (Regions 5, 8, and 10). These numbers reflect annual costs for a family of 4.⁹

Housing costs	
Region 3	\$7,760
Region 1 (Marquette)	\$8,292
Region 2 (Grand Traverse)	\$9,900
Region 5 (Saginaw)	\$8,388
Region 8 (Ingham)	\$9,302
Region 10 (Wayne)	\$10,152

Comparisons with the urban settings that young people are drawn to across the country show an even bigger gap in cost of living. Housing costs are triple Region 3’s monthly average in San Francisco, double in Seattle, and 50% higher in Denver and Chicago. Food, transportation, and taxes are generally higher in these urban areas as well.

The lower cost of housing can be featured as an asset when promoting Region 3 as an attractive place to live, work, and play. It can also be used as a counter to the issue of lower wages, emphasizing that a talented

⁸ “Michigan’s College Drop-outs;” MAP: College Drop-out Rates by County, Bridge, 2016.

⁹ Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016.

worker making top dollar in Region 3 can afford an even better quality of life than someone making higher wages in other areas.

Special Populations

With reductions in the population, especially among the working age, and difficulty attracting talent from outside the region because of lower wages, it's important to examine populations that aren't readily participating in the workforce. Individuals on public assistance, the long-term unemployed, and those with disabilities may provide great opportunity for developing skilled talent and meeting the area's workforce needs.

Individuals on public assistance in Region 3 are primarily of working age, between 22 and 44. Many recipients of food stamps and other welfare programs are already working at part-time, low-skilled jobs, but they could be trained and/or incentivized to access full-time, in-demand positions. Although the number of people on public programs has decreased significantly in the last five years (30%), this group still represents a potential target for effective talent development activities.¹⁰

The long-term unemployed are those individuals who have been unemployed for at least 27 weeks.

Approximately **37%** of all unemployed in Region 3 meet this definition. While there are likely many valid reasons for this phenomenon, it remains a significant indicator of potential workforce activity. The percentage of unemployed who are considered "long-term" is higher in Region 3 than in Region 1, which is at 33.8%. Region 2 is experiencing a similar issue, with 37.7% of their unemployed considered "long-term."¹¹

Individuals with disabilities have higher unemployment rates than the general population. Approximately 50% of individuals with a disability in Region 3 are of working age (18 to 64).¹² Of those, only 25.5% participate in the labor force. Since the severity of disabilities vary, many individuals with disabilities are able and want to work, but 26.9% are unemployed.¹³ With appropriate and reasonable accommodations, it is very possible to access this otherwise hidden pool of potential talent to assist in meeting the demands of local companies.

¹⁰ Workforce Analysis Report for Northeast Michigan, MBLMISI, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Employment Status by Disability, American Communities Survey, US Census Bureau, 2014.

Growth Industries

No reliable source of data provides industry and occupational projections for the ten-year timespan of this plan. However, the state of Michigan has made available industry and occupational forecasts for the ten-year timespan of 2012 to 2022. (They anticipate publication of the 2014 to 2022 projections during the summer of 2017.) These forecasts indicate that the economy of the region will grow in specific industries and decline in others. Much of the growth in jobs will occur in the healthcare industry, due to the greater demands for care from an aging population. This represents an opportunity for workforce development, business start-ups, and community growth.

Other growth industries include Transportation and Warehousing, Manufacturing, Construction, and Professional and Business Services. The occupations that are most in-demand for each of these industries range from entry level to highly specialized. The opportunities available for jobs, education, and business development in these areas should be the driving force behind any strategies for building a talent pipeline.¹⁴

Industry	Employment 2012	Employment 2022	Percent Change
Retail Trade	10,960	10,860	-0.9%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	9,560	10,212	6.8%
Transportation and Warehousing	1,460	1,630	11.6%
Manufacturing	5,170	5,420	4.8%
Construction	2,380	2,780	16.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1,790	1,850	3.4%
Professional and Business Services	2,320	2,620	12.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	6,410	6,860	7.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	7,530	8,040	6.8%
Government	6,270	6,090	-2.9%
Financial Activities	2,320	2,360	1.7%

¹⁴ Industry Projections, Northeast Prosperity Region; MLBMISI; 2016.

TALENT IN NORTHEAST MICHIGAN: ASSETS, CHALLENGES, AND KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

This section of the 10-Year Talent Plan report provides a thorough exploration of the assets and challenges in Region 3. The recommendations and their strategies that follow give the region a guide for overcoming the challenges by leveraging the region’s plentiful assets. In order to measure the effectiveness of these and other activities related to talent attraction and development, we recommend tracking some key economic indicators. Improvements in these indicators will give the region a measure for whether its activities are successful.

Talent Challenges in Northeast Michigan

The systems in place for supporting talent attraction and development in Northeast Michigan are plentiful and high quality. However, as with any programming, improvements can be made to better utilize the existing talent development resources. Below is a listing, by no means exhaustive, of talent-related assets in Region 3, as well as the potential impact they can have with increased exposure, funding, and/or utilization.

Asset: Michigan Works Agencies and programs

Region 3 includes two Michigan Works! Agencies: Northeast Michigan Consortium and Region 7B Employment Consortium. Both agencies are respected community stakeholders throughout the region, and have effective services to offer. During the Regional Prosperity Initiative planning process, stakeholders claimed that few people are aware of the multiple and varied services available from these agencies. Increased awareness about availability of services could assist the agencies in reaching more people.

The Michigan Works! agencies are stretched to provide services across a large geographic area with minimal population density. Unfortunately, funding relies on a formula that is heavily weighted by population and does not account for widespread regions. Additional operational funding could help the agencies deliver services in more communities and for more people. Additional training funds could help the agencies better prepare a skilled workforce to meet the needs of local employers, now and in the future.

Asset: Talent District Career Council

The Talent District Career Council (TDCC) is a collaborative body that operates on a regional level and advises both workforce development boards. Its membership consists of representation from postsecondary, Adult Education, Michigan Works, K-12, Career & Technical Education, and private sector. The council provides a forum for the stakeholders in talent development to truly work in a collaborative way. Although not a governing body, the potential for impact is great: regional grant applications, new cooperative initiatives, and development of effective strategies can be led by the TDCC.

Asset: Blue collar, patriotic culture

Region 3 embodies the “small-town America” culture that many people desire. Residents are hard-working, community-oriented, and reluctant to rely on government programs. They highly value their personal freedoms, private property, and 2nd amendment rights. Local elected officials represent these ideals and support small government rather than seeking its intervention. In addition, residents’ heartfelt patriotism can be witnessed throughout the region at sporting events, festivals, family gatherings, and much more.

Asset: Career and Technical Education

All major population centers offer career and technical education programs to local high school youth. These programs are designed to be responsive to the needs of area industry, and are a vital component of the community. Programs include automotive, healthcare, culinary arts, marketing, landscaping, construction, drafting and design, computer applications, public safety, and much more. Program providers are active across the region, working collaboratively with their local districts and with postsecondary institutions. Some of the programs are now offering early college, where students attend school for a 13th year and graduate with both their high school diploma and associate’s degree. Partly due to state leadership and financial support, these programs are being expanded in Region 3. Overcoming the challenge of declining population and therefore revenue will be paramount to continuing the success of these programs.

Asset: Occupational and postsecondary programs

An inventory of postsecondary educational opportunities was conducted for Region 3 during a previous Regional Prosperity Initiative project. This inventory reveals the strength of educational systems and training programs. These strengths include a variety of programs available for in-demand occupations, as well as customizable trainings for new and incumbent workers and development of businesses. The private

institution Industrial Arts Institute, along with four community colleges and a University Center provide a robust mix of vocational trainings, short-term certificate and associate's degree programs, as well as access to University offerings.

Recommendations from the previously published report include forming a network of providers, working collaboratively to engage local employers, and forming cooperative partnerships for accessing potential funding sources. Our research indicates that while some of the collaborative approaches are indeed happening, no formal network has been established and is viewed as unnecessary. It is possible that the Talent District Career Council (above) could help to coordinate specific activities that require collaboration.

Asset: Adult Education programs

Along with the inventory of postsecondary education, the previous report on talent development in Region 3 assessed the state of Adult Education programming. Fortunately, the system serving Northeast Michigan has survived the many recent changes in policy, funding, and performance expectations. Providers are pursuing more collaborative opportunities, such as co-location with Michigan Works! in all counties. With support and coordination from the Talent District Career Council, Adult Education is focused more on assisting learners with transitioning to postsecondary education and/or employment, and therefore planning for continued development beyond their GED.

One challenge to current Adult Education services is lack of awareness about the services. The system would benefit from a targeted, collaborative marketing strategy (see Career Pathways Recommendations). In addition, more funding will help the region's Adult Education programs to offer services to more people, and ongoing collaborative planning and program development will ensure alignment with Regional Prosperity Initiative goals.

Asset: Quality of Life and Low Cost of Living

As mentioned in the opening of this report, Region 3 offers an attractive lifestyle for families, outdoor and recreation lovers, and those who don't want the fast-paced and crowded city life. Small, family-oriented communities, low crime rates, low-stress commutes and good schools are all very attractive features to many people. Although these assets might normally come with a higher cost of living, as it is in other regions of the state (i.e. Northwest), that is not the case for Region 3. The high quality of life combined with low cost of living is a unique attribute. This asset can be leveraged by developing effective methods of reaching skilled workers who would be attracted to the area. Businesses and communities must have the tools they need to promote this asset when recruiting. Further, other areas of Michigan should learn of the great lifestyle, low cost of living, and plentiful job opportunities in Region 3.

Asset: Wood Products Industry Cluster

It is clear why Region 3 is appealing to the wood products industry: there is a critical mass of companies, a skilled workforce (although there does appear to be a labor shortage compared to demand), access to transportation routes, and of course plenty of timber. These place-based assets make this region the perfect location for wood products companies, as well as complementary industries such as logistics, to form a cluster. A Wood Products Industry report has already been created, which identifies companies, assets, challenges, and strategies for supporting and further developing this sector. Additional support for talent development in this industry is a recommended strategy in this plan (see Sector Strategies Recommendations).

Asset: Growing Healthcare Industry

The healthcare industry is projected to grow by 18% in the next ten years. Already, it represents more than 13% of the region's economy, providing almost 8,000 jobs as of the second quarter in 2016. Most importantly, the types of jobs available through this industry are not only numerous, they vary from low skilled to highly specialized and everything in between. The low skilled jobs are plentiful. Personal care aide and home health aide positions totaled 1,487 jobs in 2016. While these jobs are low in pay, they are available with minimal training, allowing for an easy way to get started in the field. The career pathways leading upward from these positions are numerous as well; a person can pursue personal care-based positions, technical positions, or office-related work. The highly skilled jobs rank among the highest paid positions in the region; the median wage for a Registered Nurse in the region was \$27.60 in 2015. Specialized RNs, such as those who work in the operating room, treat diabetics, and/or have advanced certifications command an even higher wage. As a whole, this industry's projected expansion and various career pathways options offer a tremendous opportunity for economic growth in the region.

Asset: Career Awareness Activities

Career exploration and awareness activities are available throughout the region and are increasing. Partnerships of secondary education, workforce development, and employers, offer opportunities for young people to experience various jobs while still in middle or high school. Tours of facilities (called Talent Tours), career expos, job shadowing, and work experience programs are excellent ways of exposing young people to career pathways in their own backyard.

Expansion of these activities involving more employers and schools will help to improve outreach to the future workforce. Connecting these activities with the Career Pathways and Apprenticeship opportunities to be developed (see Sector Partnership Recommendations) will be important to successful implementation of these strategies.

Asset: Major Transportation Infrastructure

The system of state roads throughout Region 3 is well-connected to the primary population centers. In addition, Interstate 75 provides a major thoroughfare connecting the region to the Upper Peninsula and to the metropolitan areas in Southeastern Michigan. The commute to Saginaw, Flint, or Detroit is a quick trip because of this highway; and it makes logistics much simpler for businesses located in the Western counties of the region. I-75 also supports the region significantly via traffic through town in Gaylord and Grayling.

Asset: Camp Grayling Military Training Center

As the National Guard's largest training center, Camp Grayling is a unique asset for Region 3. Its economic importance to the area is unquestioned, drawing more than 100,000 military personnel to the site per year. The camp supports the region with 200 local jobs and \$20 million in economic impact. It is also a source of local pride and patriotism. A part of the region's heritage, the base has been in existence for more than 100 years. Featuring the camp in talent attraction and regional promotional activities will increase awareness of the region's patriotic culture.

Talent Challenges in Northeast Michigan

Identifying key challenges is an important step in devising effective talent development strategies. Watching the impact of these strategies requires designating data points as indicators for changes in the region. Below is a listing of challenges as well as recommended talent, demographic and economic indicators to track. We recommend adding the indicators (shown in bold, italic) to the Regional Prosperity Initiative's Performance Dashboard.

Challenge: Decreasing working age population, increasing retirement age

The decrease in working age population for Region 3 is of grave concern. Companies are especially worried about how to replace skilled workers as they retire in the near term. It is also difficult to determine how the additional 5,000 jobs will be filled with fewer workers. And with relatively low unemployment, there is not a ready pool of unemployed people to access.

Talent attraction and retention efforts will be one component to reversing this trend. A useful data point for tracking this issue is ***population of individuals ages 25 to 54***. As talent attraction efforts are increased, their effectiveness will be reflected through increases in that population.

While talent attraction and retention strategies are important, they must be conducted in tandem with talent development activities. These strategies involve increasing the skills of the local workforce so that they are able to obtain the jobs available. One such strategy will be to increase the use of USDOL Registered Apprenticeships. Tracking the ***number of apprenticeship programs*** available as well as the ***number of apprentices*** in the region will measure success.

Effective talent development and recruitment activities should involve accessing populations that are typically overlooked, such as those with disabilities, those on public assistance, and the long-term unemployed. The ***Labor Force Participation Rate, number of individuals on public assistance, and the long-term unemployment rate***, will help to measure success in these areas.

Challenge: Lack of soft skills

A common refrain among employers is their frustration with finding workers with soft skills - the skills that are used on every job, in any setting, and with all types of industries. These skills often make the difference between a high-quality worker in whom the employer will invest, and one who is terminated. Teamwork, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, attitude, initiative, and personal accountability are the primary skills employers are seeking. Yet they have difficulty finding new workers who have these skills.

It is commonly held that hands-on experience is the best way to learn these skills. Workshops and classes can have a certain level of effectiveness, but the real-time application of these skills is what helps workers see their value and continue their practice. Therefore, a recommended strategy will be to increase work-based learning opportunities, especially for young people. In addition, entrepreneurial training teaches these same skills, and studies show that completers of entrepreneurship classes are more likely to complete high school, attend college, and earn more in their lifetimes. Tracking the number of **work experience program placements** as well as the **number of entrepreneurial training programs** in the region will determine whether this challenge is being addressed.

Challenge: Low educational attainment

Region 3's educational attainment is lower than the state average and lower than other regions of similar size and character. Yet employers are in dire need of workers with skills that postsecondary education provides. Companies that may be interested in locating in Region 3 may be deterred by the low levels of education.

Several of our recommended strategies will address this issue, and thereby improve the overall rate of secondary and postsecondary credential attainment. However, measuring success will require a primary method of gathering data: there is no appropriate data point from any reliable source. The U.S. Census Bureau gathers information on residents' education based on whether they have completed high school, attended some college, or achieved a degree. These statistics do not indicate whether a person has obtained a vocational credential, such as a welding certificate, CDL, C.N.A. license, or apprenticeship. Therefore, we recommend establishing a system for working with local educational institutions to ascertain a region-wide **credential attainment indicator**. Making this information available will inform students and families, job seekers, businesses, and policymakers about the true educational attainment of the region.

Challenge: Jobs are low-paying and part-time

A region-wide survey regarding workforce development activities indicates that the number one barrier to Region 3's growth is low-paying jobs. The third barrier selected by respondents in the survey is lack of full-time job opportunities. It is true that wages are low compared to other similar regions, and poverty is higher (see Data and Demographics section above). However, there is great potential to grow business and create more full-time, good-paying jobs. Strategies that support business development and educational opportunities for increasing skill levels will help address this challenge.

In order to measure success in efforts to increase wages and full-time employment, Region 3 can track **median income** and overall **poverty rate**. These indicators will show long-term progress, but can be lagging in the time it takes data sources to report the information. Another means of tracking success is for the

Michigan Works! agencies to gather information on average *wages of jobs* filled with their assistance. Michigan Works! can also be a source of information regarding the availability of *part-time vs. full-time jobs* posted in state's labor exchange system, Pure Michigan Talent Connect.

Challenge: Lack of available, affordable childcare

Many workers face the challenge of finding affordable, quality childcare in order to go to work. The average cost of childcare for a family of 4 (2 children) is \$10,713 per year.¹ While this cost is quite a bit less than the average for Region 2 of \$12,000 per year, it is still a significant strain on any family's budget. In order for a quality childcare center or family home to cover its business costs, it must often charge a higher price than many low-income families can afford.

In addition to affordability, childcare isn't available as readily as it should be throughout the region. There are 246 licensed childcare providers in Region 3, with a high of 46 providers in Otsego county and a low of only 7 providers in Oscoda.² Availability is especially limited for children with special needs and for 2nd shift times (aggregate data is not accessible for this information). Given that the retail and hospitality industries are such a substantial portion of Region 3's economy, this is an important challenge to overcome.

There is potential opportunity for small business startups in the childcare field. However, there are regulatory requirements that can make the process difficult. Reimbursements from government programs can make childcare more affordable for low-income families, but the payments often lag and put a burden on the provider's cash flow. Another potential strategy for addressing this challenge is for companies to offer on-site childcare as a benefit to their employees. This may be too big for smaller companies, but by joining together they can help the region to increase the affordability and availability of quality childcare.

Challenge: Limited capacity of business support organizations

Throughout the RPI process, it became very clear that the resources available to support businesses in Region 3 are not sufficient to meet demand. There was virtually no awareness of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC); upon further investigation, we discovered that Region 3's SBDC program is quite successful but its staffing is limited, especially for such a large geography. In addition, only one SCORE chapter is active in the region - this is a new chapter formed as a result of the prior RPI plan. Our recommendation for addressing this challenge is to engage these organizations in a Regional Entrepreneurial Collaborative. The group should determine the best measures for indicating increased capacity based on activities of the collaborative.

¹ Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016.

² Great Start to Quality Northeast Regional Resource Center, 2016.

Challenge: Lack of entrepreneurial culture

Region 3's long history of manufacturing-based industry has created a blue-collar culture. While this is also an asset to the region, it can prevent young and old alike from recognizing the opportunity to start their own business. In order to change a culture, information must be widely shared, and the features and benefits of entrepreneurship should be emphasized in multiple arenas. Strategies for improving the entrepreneurial culture are included in our recommendations, and focus on increasing experience-based entrepreneurship programming, especially for young people.

Tracking the increase in establishments is one way to determine change in this challenge, but it does not necessarily indicate a change in attitudes and interest in entrepreneurship. We recommend a regular **survey of targeted age groups** to assess whether the increase in entrepreneurial activities throughout the region have had any impact on entrepreneurial culture.

Key Economic Indicators for tracking improvements in Talent Challenges

Indicator	Source
Increase in population of residents 25 to 54	U.S. Census Bureau; must be aggregated
Increase in USDOL Registered apprenticeship programs and apprentices	U.S. DOL Apprentices Sponsors Database; U.S. DOL Office of Apprenticeship
Increase in labor force participation rate	Employment Status by Disability Status, American Communities Survey, U.S. Census Bureau; must be aggregated
Decrease in number of individuals on public assistance	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Decreased long-term unemployment rate	Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives
Increase in work experience program placements	Michigan Works! Agencies
Increase in entrepreneurial training programs	Primary data collection - soft skills satisfaction survey
Increase in credential attainment	Primary data collection - educational institutions in the region
Increase in median income	Already included in performance dashboard
Decrease in poverty rate	Already included in performance dashboard
Increase in average wages of jobs filled with Michigan Works! assistance	Michigan Works! Agencies

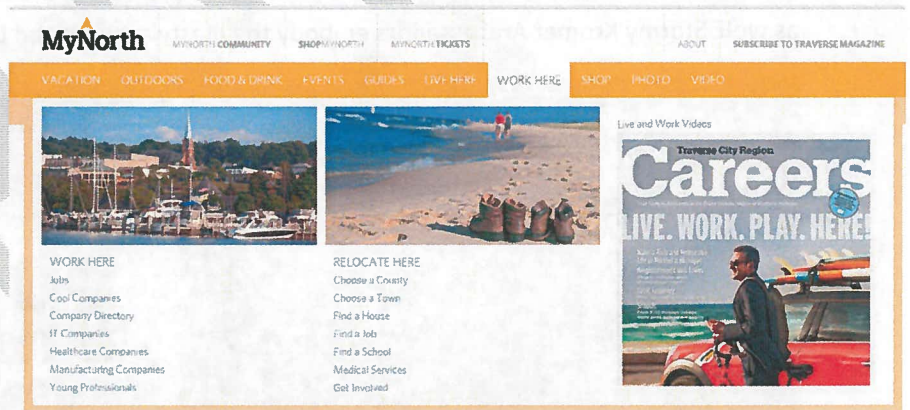
Decrease in ratio of part-time jobs to full-time jobs posted on Pure Michigan Talent Connect	Michigan Works! Agencies and Talent Investment Agency
Increase in number of licensed childcare providers, those who take special needs children, and those who cover 2 nd shift	Great Start Connect, Great Start to Quality Northeast Resource Center
Increase in number of business establishments	Already included in performance dashboard
Survey of attitudes toward entrepreneurship	Primary data collection - various partners

BEST PRACTICES

Before developing the recommended strategies and implementation activities, we searched the state and country for programs and initiatives that have been successful in leveraging a region’s assets to overcome significant challenges in talent attraction and development. These programs and initiatives are primarily from rural areas similar to Region 3; some have been implemented in metropolitan areas but have potential for adaptation to a rural environment. Each of the best practices featured here connects to one or more of the challenges and assets identified in the sections above. Collectively, they serve as examples of successful implementation of one or more of the Recommendations provided in this report.

Best Practice, Talent Attraction: MyNorth - The official “Live-Work-Play” web site of Northwest Michigan

In 2015, the Northwest region set out to develop a comprehensive Live-Work-Play website and issued a Request for Proposals for its development. MyNorth Media responded with a proposal that drastically reduced duplication and unnecessary effort: They already had a strong following - a massive audience of 1.5 million people from around the country who love Northwestern lower



Michigan. The project resulted in a public-private partnership, leveraging the extensive reach of MyNorth’s multiple media channels (website, email newsletters, *Traverse the Magazine*, and *Careers* publications).

While the existing MyNorth online presence was strong in the “Live” and “Play” elements, the “Work” component needed to be added. In order to do so, the following functionality was programmed into the site:

- Job postings feed in from Pure Michigan Talent Connect
- Company directories for Healthcare, IT, and Manufacturing
- Partnership with Michigan Works to feature hot jobs in email newsletters
- Featured businesses - “Cool Companies” - via online profile and videos

- County-based web sites that link to information on schools and housing; also feature a 3-minute video

The site is now being used by businesses and communities when recruiting candidates from outside the region. There is also an intentional effort to lead visitors to the web site as well as email newsletter subscribers through the site to view job postings, cool company videos, and the online directories.

More information: [MyNorth](#) home page; “[Work Here](#)” landing page; [job postings](#) feed from PMTC; companies by industry - [Healthcare](#), [Manufacturing](#), [Information Technology](#); county and community pages - [Antrim](#) county, Village of [Empire](#), [Missaukee](#) county, [Petoskey](#).

Best Practice, Talent Attraction: Stormy Kromer Ambassadors

The outdoor apparel and accessories company Stormy Kromer is located in Ironwood, MI, but their customers cover the globe. They are a local employer of choice, and commit significant resources to workforce development. Their innovative strategy for promoting their brand has implications for the region as well: Stormy Kromer Ambassadors embody the lifestyle supported by the Upper Peninsula.



There is an application and selection process to become a Stormy Kromer Ambassador. Those selected represent the product’s target market: outdoors enthusiasts; down-to-earth attitude; various ages; middle to upper income. Some are quasi-celebrities, such as well-known bloggers and photographers, and even a radio show host. They are able to leverage their current audience in promoting the brand. The ambassadors promote the brand through social media and the web, sharing pictures and experiences.

More information: <http://blog.stormykromer.com/blog/2016/03/09/our-2016-brand-ambassadors/>

Best Practice, Talent Attraction: Greater Minnesota Rising

This was a research project designed to determine what attracts and retains young talent in the rural regions of Northwestern Minnesota. They refer to their target audience (mostly millennials, but could include individuals of any age who are entering new fields) as “emerging leaders.” Their research included review of existing studies, small focus groups, and a large event that utilized the world cafe model for facilitating productive conversations about talent attraction. Relevant findings indicate that most “emerging leaders” came to or stayed in the rural area because of family connections. Also, their primary desire was to engage with the community, developing relationships that connected them to others in their area, and participating in events and activities that are meaningful.

More information: <https://www.ere-media.com/ere/recruiting-talent-to-unglamorous-places-part-2-reverse-marketing/>

Best Practice, Talent Attraction: Traverse City Young Professionals - YP Connect and Wingman

The Traverse City Young Professionals group is headquartered at the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce. They offer volunteer and networking opportunities to local young professionals.

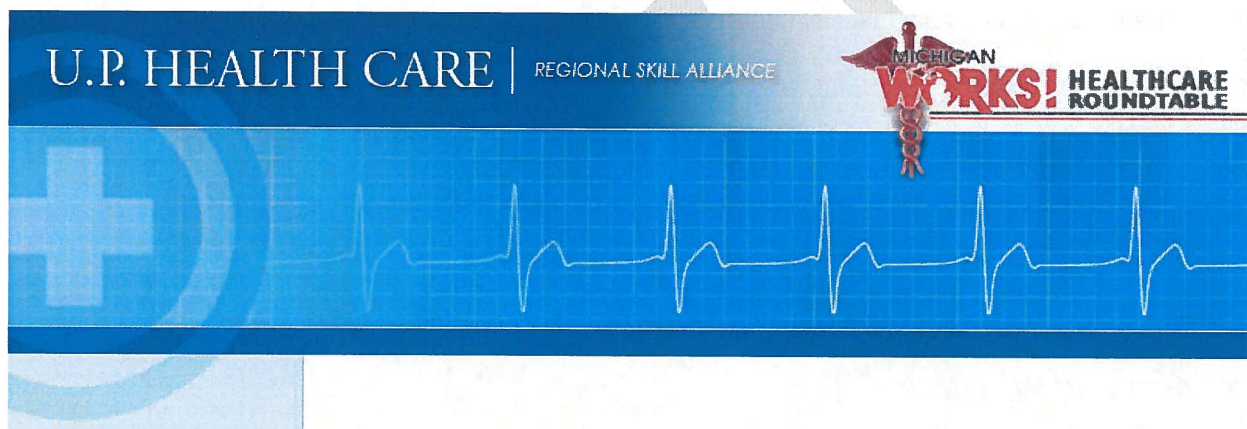
The *YP Connect* program was intended to support talent attraction efforts among area businesses, especially for trailing spouses. The group designated a chairperson from various industries - hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, etc. This “chair” was selected not only because of his/her expertise in the field, but also connections within the industry as well as in the community. When a resume came into the Young Professionals group, it was sent to the appropriate chair. This person would then connect with the trailing spouse or job candidate and discuss job opportunities, places to live, recreation, networking events, and more.

The *Wingman* program was very simple: Connect new Young Professionals with people in the community. The program was conducted exclusively at the chamber’s Business After Hours events. The YP group stationed their most social, highly networked members at the door of Business After Hours. They would welcome new members and introduce them to others at the event, kick-starting the person’s networking efforts.

Both the *YP Connect* and *Wingman* programs are now defunct. Despite their simplicity and effectiveness, no specific entity or person was designated to manage them. This is a lesson learned: any program, no matter how well-intentioned, must be supported and coordinated in order to be sustainable.

More information about Traverse City Young Professionals: <http://tcchamber.org/events-and-programs/tcyp/>

Best Practice, Sector Partnerships: Healthcare Roundtable, UPward Talent Council



This sector partnership has been in existence for approximately 15 years. It formed when industry representatives from two local hospitals approached the workforce development board to discuss their shortage in Registered Nurses. The group was small at first, and came together to brainstorm strategies for addressing the shortage. Outreach was done to additional partners, including education, long-term care facilities, and the other Michigan Works! Agencies in the Upper Peninsula. Together, they have conducted several successful initiatives, including:

- A collaborative marketing campaign to recruit nurses, including television advertising;
- Targeted recruitment of former nurses who had left the field and nontraditional populations (males);
- Survey of healthcare companies;
- Development of a medical coding postsecondary program at Gogebic College;
- Career awareness publications.

The group continues to work together to address workforce challenges across the Upper Peninsula. Plans for upcoming work include legislative advocacy, staff sharing, and more career awareness activities.

More information: [Upper Peninsula Healthcare Roundtable](#)

Best Practice, Sector Partnerships: Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board (State of Massachusetts)

With support from the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WTCF), the Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board has created a successful manufacturing sector partnership. Valley Steel Stamp, a local manufacturer, led an effort to organize local businesses to raise \$250,000 in private contributions to upgrade equipment at Franklin County Technical School. Students in the high school manufacturing program had been learning on old, outdated equipment and were therefore not prepared for the jobs local employers needed to fill. With a grant from the WTCF, the Board was also able to expand training to unemployed and underemployed adults in the evenings when the new equipment was not being used to instruct high school students.

To develop the partnership, the Board convened local employers, workforce development service providers, Franklin County Technical School (CTE), and Greenfield Community College. Each partner was engaged as appropriate on program design, recruiting and screening participants, instruction, placement and following up on post-program job retention. Skilled workers at participating businesses are serving as technical skills instructors for the newly developed training programs. Greenfield Community College has institutionalized successful training programs, helping to sustain the partnership's training activities in the region beyond the life of the grant. Since 2013, 49 adult participants have completed training and 41 (84 percent) have been successfully placed in employment.

More information: [Sector Partnership Policy Toolkit](#), National Skills Coalition

Best Practice, Career Pathways: Transitioning Adults to Postsecondary Education and Training (TAPET)

A program of the collaborative Northwest Michigan Works/TBAISD Adult Education system, TAPET was initially a demonstration project that is now integrated into program delivery. The purpose of the program is to ensure successful transition for adult learners. Participants in traditional adult education programs typically achieve their GED, are deemed completed, and move out of the system with little or no follow-up. The Adult Education programming in Northwest Michigan recognizes that most living wage jobs require additional training beyond a GED.

The TAPET program uses the diagnostic version of COMPAS, so an adult learning plan can be customized to the individual's need and placement goals. Learning is contextualized to the participant's career goal. Partnerships with local colleges were developed and enhanced, in order to ease transition to their

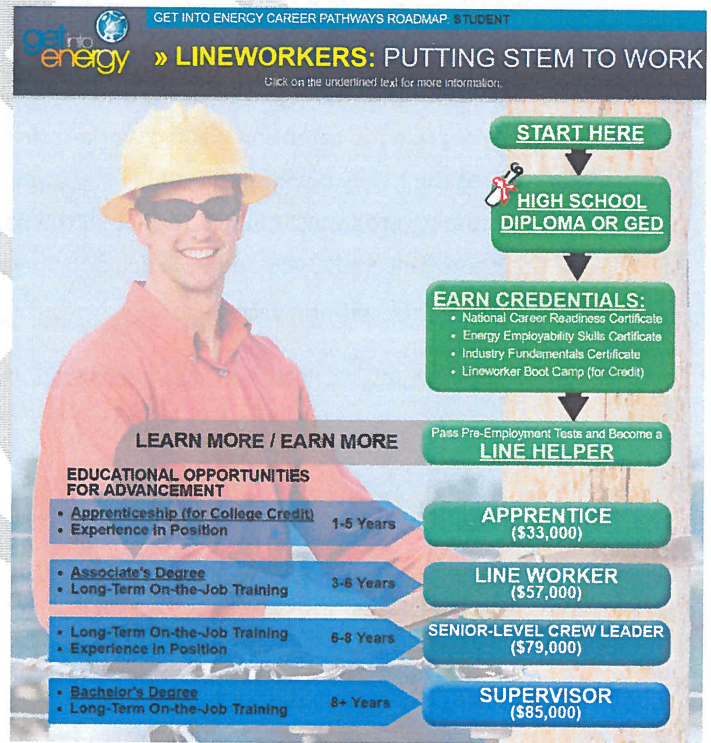
programming. Prior to enrollment at a college, participants can go on specialized campus tours with former adult ed students who are currently enrolled, take workshops on financial aid and effective study skills, and connect with college admissions and support services. Upon and after enrollment, adult learners are paired with a mentor and incentivized to stay in college to completion.

More information: [Northwest Michigan Works! Adult Education Learning Labs](#)

Best Practice, Career Pathways (Roadmaps): Center for Energy Workforce Development

Formed as an alliance of utility companies and their associations, the Center partners with educational institutions, unions, and workforce development to address workforce challenges. The group’s strategic goals including building career awareness, developing short and long-term training solutions, and planning for the workforce of tomorrow.

One of their most impressive products is a comprehensive collection of roadmaps for various career pathways in the energy industry. These visual representations of career options are extremely useful to all parties, including the worker/student, business, workforce agency, and union. Titled “Get Into Energy,” the roadmaps help everyone to gain a common understanding of the jobs available in the industry as well as the skills and credentials required for each.



More information: [Get Into Energy Career Pathways Roadmaps](#)

Best Practice, Career Pathways/Apprenticeship: Medical Assistant Apprenticeship Program

This initiative began with a convening of local healthcare providers by West Michigan Works! and educational partners. When data was shared indicating a need for more than 300 medical assistants per year in the coming five years, the group rallied to come up with a solution. Collaboratively, they developed the nation's first USDOL Registered Apprenticeship for the Medical Assistant occupation.

West Michigan Works! serves as the official holder of the standards of apprenticeship. This alleviates a significant amount of paperwork on the part of multiple employers, who would otherwise need to obtain this designation separately. The agency also assists with documentation, calculating return on investment, and supporting training costs with workforce funding.

More information: [Apprenticeships in West Michigan](#)

Best Practice, Employer Resource Network: Great Lakes Bay ERN



ERN-MICHIGAN
Employer Resource Network

*Empowering employment by improving
employee retention and productivity*

The Saginaw, Midland, and Bay City areas are served by the Great Lakes Bay Employer Resource Network, in partnership with Community Ventures. This ERN provides confidential on-site success coaching for employees who are struggling with issues that could prevent them from succeeding on the job. Community Ventures, a program of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, supports the ERN with funding, business outreach, and leadership. The goal of all partners is to provide wrap-around support and ensure employee success and retention.

More information: <http://www.ern-mi.com/area-network.aspx?AreaID=13>

Best Practice, Soft Skills Training through Work Experience: GOOD Training Program

Goodwill Northern Michigan provides hands-on, real-world job training opportunities to individuals who need a hand up. Their programs prepare participants for the workforce by offering certifications and experience in hospitality, food service, commercial cleaning, and retail (all leading sectors in local job growth). Goodwill job coaches have found that hands-on experiences help participants see relevancy and application, thereby improving retention and mastery. Supervisors are trained to address poor behaviors immediately, and give participants a chance to try again. Trainees learn new skills, develop good work habits, and connect to real job opportunities through partnerships with local employers. Goodwill doesn't just teach the skills to do the job, though; they empower trainees to embrace their strengths and recognize their potential. Throughout the training program, Goodwill case managers work with participants to address barriers to employment, such as access to stable housing, reliable transportation, and quality daycare. The program utilizes their retail stores, recycling system, food truck, and other services to provide these workforce experiences.

More information: <http://www.goodwillnmi.org/jobs/workforce-development/>

Best Practice, Soft Skills Training through Work Experience: Roca, Boston MA

Roca is a transitional jobs program for at-risk young men ages 18 to 24, most of whom are juvenile offenders and high school drop-outs. The program's goal is to help participants develop practical skills, change self-defeating behaviors, and prevent future incarceration. Roca believes that the best way to achieve these goals is through successful participation in the workforce. When placed in a transitional job, these young men can get fired from the job and then earn their way back into the position by proving they have learned new employability skills. This can happen multiple times until true change has occurred. Program staff (many of whom graduated from the program themselves) work with participants to address poor behaviors, work through their failure, and eventually succeed.

More information: <http://rocainc.org/about/our-story/>

Best Practice, Entrepreneurial Collaborative: The Innovation Collaborative, Northwest Pennsylvania

Innovation Collaborative

This group recognized that the Northwest Pennsylvania region lagged behind other similar areas on innovation indicators, such as venture capital investment, patent activity, and high tech employment. Yet entrepreneurship is “key to job growth and wealth creation.” The group exists to raise awareness about the importance of entrepreneurship, measure the elements of the region’s entrepreneurial ecosystems, and empower local entrepreneurs. They are a repository for information about and connections to resources. They also coordinate a student entrepreneurship competition and host a high-energy awards party to celebrate local innovators.

More information: <https://innovationcollaborators.com/>

Best Practice, Entrepreneurship Summit: The Diamond Challenge Youth Entrepreneurship Summit (YES)

The Diamond Challenge is a program housed at the University of Delaware. Its purpose is to promote and encourage entrepreneurship among high school students. The “challenge” is a competition that awards \$100,000 in funding to potential startups. Preparing for the challenge is the focus of the curriculum; students are matched with mentors, learn best practices in entrepreneurship, and connect to postsecondary education. The final phase of the competition is held at the Youth Entrepreneurship Summit. YES focuses on innovation, and offers a full day of programming dedicated to engaging young people in entrepreneurship.

More information: <http://diamondchallenge.org/youth-entrepreneurship-summit/>

Best Practice, Entrepreneurial Training: Oscoda County Achieves

The 23rd Circuit Court Family Division has seen the vision of teaching entrepreneurial skills to youth as a means of preventing involvement with the justice system. Oscoda County Achieves began with a seed grant, and has expanded with support from the court and the Oscoda County Economic Development Alliance. The

program uses Junior Achievement curriculum at the middle school and high school level. Students grow produce in a greenhouse and sell it as a way to experience running a business. There is also a competition that teaches the youth to grow a small investment of \$10. Stakeholders in the program give full credit for its success to the coordinator, who is a native of the area and former educator. She is therefore well-respected and trusted, allowing for swift entry into the schools and participation by multiple classrooms.

More information: <http://www.janortheastmi.org/oscoda-county-achieves/>

Best Practice, Entrepreneurship Support: Maine Enterprise Option

Although a statewide example, this best practice is promising for assistance to long-term unemployed and other targets for entrepreneurship support. The program allows the unemployed to pursue entrepreneurship training instead of conducting traditional job search while collecting unemployment benefits. It utilizes Self Employment Assistance, a UI program, and pays for the training with workforce funds. The state of Michigan would have to enact new legislation to implement this program, but there is already interest on the part of several legislators and the Governor.

More information: <http://bangordailynews.com/2010/10/29/business/maine-entrepreneurs-get-fresh-starts-after-layoffs/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategies provided here fall into three primary Recommendation categories: Talent Attraction, Talent Development, and Entrepreneurship. There are many action items and implementation steps that will require commitment of time, energy and financial resources by various stakeholders. In order to catalyze the commitment that will be needed, **our primary recommendation is to first establish a region-wide vision for talent.** This can be done through facilitated visioning sessions in communities across the region, or it could be developed and established at the RPI Collaborative table. Regardless of the process used, we feel it is imperative to adopt an overall vision to unify, energize, and guide the talent activities recommended in this report.

If the region is experiencing planning/visioning process fatigue, as are so many other areas across the state and country, then we recommend that the RPI Collaborative endorse the following vision statement:

FILL 10,000 GOOD JOBS IN 10 YEARS.

This statement gives a specific, measurable goal that is challenging yet achievable. Here are the assumptions that led to the development of this vision:

- A “Good” job is one that is permanent, full-time, and pays \$14 per hour or more. Focusing on higher wage, stable jobs will help to increase the region’s median wage, attract skilled talent to the area, and spur economic growth.
- Based on current and recent trends, we can anticipate sizable job growth during the ten-year timeframe of this plan. We also know that replacement jobs will increase due to retirements.
- According to the Michigan Works! Dashboard, the 8-county local area of Michigan Works! Northeast Consortium filled almost 1,800 jobs last year. We do not know how many were full-time and at what wage.

Overall, we feel that this vision will bring all stakeholders together to achieve a common goal, and help to maintain the momentum that will be necessary to move the plan forward.

Talent Attraction

During many discussions regarding this ten-year plan, community members lamented the difficulties with attracting and retaining talent. Companies state that when they recruit a high-level professional from another area with a great job, the person leaves within a year because they are not satisfied with the community. Several of the issues listed in the Challenges section of this report were cited as the reasons for this dilemma; low wages, decreasing population, and lack of amenities were mentioned most frequently.

Talent Attraction efforts are occurring not only in other regions of Michigan, but in similar rural regions across the country and globe. The same discussions are taking place at tables everywhere. The skilled worker shortage is of increasing concern in all corners of the world. Therefore, any talent attraction activities pursued by Region 3 must recognize the high level of competition with other areas. It is for this reason that we recommend a streamlined, targeted approach: decide on your audience, identify their positive experiences with Northeast Michigan, and reach them through established channels. We believe that the limited resources of the region would be utilized most effectively through this targeted strategy.

In order to ensure ongoing governance and coordination, **we recommend creating a subcommittee of the RPI Collaborative to lead all of the talent attraction strategies** listed here. Make sure to include representatives from economic development, recruiting firms, Michigan Works, and tourism bureaus.

Recommendation: Target an audience of skilled workers who desire the lifestyle offered by Northeast Michigan

When brainstorming ideas for attracting a skilled workforce, conversations across the region continually turned toward ways in which communities could *become* more attractive to skilled talent. Ideas included offering more entertainment for young people, becoming “cool cities” that millennials especially would be drawn to, improving downtowns, and increasing cultural activities. While these are appealing options, they are rather ambitious given the resources of the region. Rather than trying to change entire communities to become what millennials want, we recommend a targeted focus on attracting a skilled workforce that appreciates the quality of life inherent in the region.

Strategy: Better understand millennials who live in Northeast Michigan

Timeline: Year one

It is very important to understand your target audience before launching into talent attraction activities. Some ideas generated during planning discussions included educating local businesses about the millennial generation by bringing in speakers and offering workshops. This can be an effective component of this strategy and will give employers the information they need to attract and retain a younger workforce. However, it is vitally important to learn more *specifically* about the millennials who currently live in Northeast Michigan. Most generalized assessments of the generation emphasize their desire for big cities; but that's obviously not true of those who live in Region 3. **Find out what drew them here and why they're happy living in Region 3.** Hold focus groups with millennials to learn more, work with established or new (see below) Young Professionals groups, and connect with young entrepreneurs. The information learned through this exercise can be used to guide several of the strategies below.

Strategy: Develop local ambassadors

Timeline: Years one and two

Recruit ambassadors to represent the region for various purposes. Choose locals who are passionate about the area, and who are members of the same target audiences you want to reach. Utilize these ambassadors in the following ways:

- Feature them in the talent attraction tools (brochures, web sites, videos) created via the strategy below.
- Connect them with potential candidates who are scoping out the area. They can meet with the candidates at a coffee shop, brewery, or park to talk about what it's like to live in Northeast Michigan.
- Promote the region on social media, blogs, and websites.

Most descriptions of the millennial generation will include how relationship-oriented they are. The same is true for all other generations when looking to relocate to another area. **Making a personal connection with someone who has similar values can make all the**

difference in successful recruitment. Local ambassadors can be called upon in many situations, and can come to personify the cultural aspects of the region.

Comparable Best Practices:

- [Stormy Kromer Ambassadors](#)
- View the video on the homepage for the [Traverse City Young Professionals](#)

Strategy: Create promotional tools for businesses and communities

Timeline: Years one through three

Local businesses are struggling to find local and non-local talent. Their Human Resources staff (typically either managers, owners, or office staff) are often not trained as recruiters; they lack the knowledge and resources to effectively compete with recruitment efforts in other regions. Providing these companies and their communities with tools specifically designed to recruit skilled talent will go a long way to supporting their efforts.

Tools should include information on schools, recreation, festivals/entertainment, cost of living - all of the information that a person looking to relocate to the region would be seeking. The more appealing the information, the better. Consider the role of economic development as a model: they consistently work on attracting new businesses to an area by presenting a “package” of information and incentives.

Make the tools customizable to various communities. **Create a template that businesses, industry sectors, and communities can use to promote their areas along with the region as a whole.**

Implementation Guidelines:

- Hold focus groups of target audiences: millennials (see strategy above), young families, skilled workers regardless of age, especially if they have recently moved to the area. What appeals to them? What convinced them to come and/or stay?
- Develop messaging for each target audience. For instance, if millennials say they are drawn to the region because of the recreational opportunities, that should be emphasized as the message and in the design of the tools. If families are drawn here because of the low cost of living, that should be

the primary message for this target audience. Other messages could include safety (low crime rate), small town values, etc.

- Identify the negatives and be prepared to counter them. What did the audiences say were drawbacks? What resources are available to overcome those drawbacks?
- Develop a methodology for creating the tools: what will be included, how will the region and/or local communities be represented, what is the format(s)? Include social media, websites, and video. Don't recreate something that already exists or develop something that requires a lot of ongoing maintenance. For instance, a website where Region 3's employers can post jobs sounds like a great idea on the surface, but there are already many web sites that do this -- find a way to partner and use what is already established in new and better ways.
- Make sure the format is aesthetically pleasing by working with a high-quality design firm. Perhaps this firm could be the same one that developed the "Discover Northeast Michigan – East of Expected" brand.
- Consider emphasizing the patriotic culture of the region as the recurring design motif.
- Find the best venues for using the tools. Identify the means for reaching the target audience - mailing lists of local high school alumni; retirees with children who live elsewhere; etc.

Strategy: Develop more Young Professionals groups

Timeline: Years two through five

Young people want to know their communities aren't dying. One of the Best Practices cited in this report is that of Greater Minnesota Rising. Through targeted interviews, they learned that millennials who left the area did so partially because they were worried their communities would "transform into ghost towns."

Connecting millennials with each other, with opportunities to get engaged in their community, and with local businesses is a great way to attract and retain workers in this generation. Young Professionals groups can be instrumental in the strategies identified below, as well as several of the talent development strategies presented later in this report.

Potential activities for Young Professionals groups:

- connect young workers with mentors at local businesses (mentorship is very important to this generation);
- volunteer for non-profits or a community such as cleaning up a park;

- getting involved in local politics;
- acting as the “welcome wagon” for new young professionals - again very important to this population;
- hunting, fishing, or other recreational activities that emphasize the Northeast Michigan lifestyle;
- serve as regional ambassadors (see strategy below).

Strategy: Promote innovative and successful companies headquartered in the region

Timeline: Year three

Whether as part of the talent attraction tools above, or as a coordinated marketing campaign among partners, everyone can play a part in promoting the great companies of Region 3. Why promote specific companies? Because great companies attract people. Great companies are the “employers of choice” - the places where everyone wants to work. These companies aren’t struggling as much as others to find and keep skilled talent right now. They offer good wages and benefits, great culture, promotion from within, internal training, and more.

It is often lamented that Region 3 doesn’t have a university, which acts as a magnet for young talent in other areas. The great companies you feature can provide similar benefit, albeit on a smaller scale. This is especially important because highly skilled professionals are interested in “job depth” - their ability to grow and progress in a career. This “depth” can be available at a specific company, but numerous opportunities within a local area indicates more depth as well. **Knowing that an area is rich with great companies to work for will be more appealing to potential job candidates.**

Potential companies to feature:

- Weyerhaeuser
- Arauco
- Alro Steel
- Otsego Memorial Hospital
- Link Industries
- Sandvik
- Nucraft

Ask the business services teams at both Michigan Works agencies, as well as the economic development representatives, to identify companies that fit this definition.

Most of the partners in the RPI Collaborative have communication functionality at their agencies. They can all promote these companies through their existing communication channels: web sites, email newsletters, social media, etc. Perhaps someone with a strong connection to a local television outlet can arrange for a “Made in Northeast Michigan” segment, where these great and often hidden companies are featured.

Comparable Best Practice: See the “Cool Companies” features on MyNorth.com

Strategy: Take it on the road

Timeline: Years four and five

After developing the tools needed to effectively recruit skilled talent, including developing local ambassadors, take them on the road to showcase the region. Use the local ambassadors, economic development representatives, and/or chamber of commerce professionals to do a roadshow. **Attend events in larger markets to target people who don’t want to live in bigger cities anymore.** Potential events include hunting and fishing expos, snowmobiling events, gun shows, and more. Career fairs and business expos could be effective events as well, but primary focus should be given to recreation-oriented, large-scale events. This will best align with the focus of targeting an audience that desires the cultural qualities of life provided by Northeast Michigan.

In addition to distributing the promotion tools and packages, the “roadshow” should promote specific job opportunities. This will require partnership with local employers, who may be able to contribute to the cost of travel.

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Strategy: Better understand millennials who live in Northeast Michigan</i>	
Goal	Conduct at least three focus groups with target audiences, including local millennials and young families, within one year.
Outcome	All stakeholders will better understand the desires and appeal of Northeast Michigan from the perspective of these target groups, and will use this information to enhance their talent attraction efforts.
<i>Strategy: Develop local ambassadors</i>	
Goal	Develop a team of ten local ambassadors within two years.
Outcome	A following of Northeast Michigan enthusiasts will begin to develop.

<i>Strategy: Create promotional tools for businesses and communities</i>	
Goal	Develop an initial package of talent attraction tools within one year; refine and add to it within three years.
Outcome	Businesses and communities will have a customizable package that promotes the region to use when recruiting.
<i>Strategy: Develop more Young Professionals groups</i>	
Goal	Every significant population center in the region should have an active Young Professionals group within five years.
Outcome	These groups will act as a means for connecting with new and existing workers, serving as local ambassadors, and engaging with the community.
<i>Strategy: Feature innovative and successful companies headquartered in the region</i>	
Goal	Create features for ten companies by year three. Share these features widely through all partners.
Outcome	Residents of the region as well as potential job candidates will see that the area provides a depth of opportunities through a multitude of great companies.
<i>Strategy: Take it on the road</i>	
Goal	Visit three events per year during years four and five. Determine effectiveness and plan for continued attendance at appropriate events in the future.
Outcome	Region 3 will be presented to new audiences with potential interest in relocating.

Talent Development

Developing the workforce that already resides in the region can be much more effective on a large scale than attracting talent, but it requires more energy and resources. To be most efficient and effective, the recommendations and strategies below utilize the sector-based approach. They are intended to support Region 3's goals for increasing employment opportunities, developing skilled talent with the existing workforce, and working collaboratively to improve economic conditions. Sector partnerships are a proven strategy for improving outcomes of talent development activities, due to heightened awareness within the industry sector, along with enhanced communication and coordination. The sector-based approach connects employers, education, economic development, and workforce systems in a coordinated way. Partners within a sector work together to undertake specific activities that advance opportunities for entry into the sector. Together, they achieve tangible results and support the long-term growth and success of the region.

In order to ensure ongoing governance and coordination, **we recommend creating a subcommittee of the Talent District Career Council (or engage the full TDCC) to lead all of the talent development strategies listed below.** Make sure to include representatives from postsecondary institutions, adult education, Michigan Works, and the private sector.

Recommendation: Conduct talent development activities using a sector-based approach

In our global economy, Region 3 is competing with the farthest corners of the world, in addition to other areas of Michigan and the Midwest. Sector partnerships will strengthen the region, despite limited resources, and show improvements in talent development. In the long-term, Region 3 will be positioned to bring in new business from around the globe, due to a robust pipeline of skilled workers.

Sector partnerships thrive in urban areas where there is a critical mass of similar companies. They join together to their mutual benefit. In rural areas, a smaller density of firms within a given sector makes it less likely that they will work cooperatively. However, this challenge makes sector partnerships all the more important in a rural area. A coordinated effort is necessary to lift the sector to the next level and assist them in addressing skill shortages and other talent development issues.

Sector partnerships take various forms in rural regions. They do not and need not follow the typical large-scale models found in urban areas. Some are short-term, ad-hoc in nature; others are full-fledged councils with membership and governance structure. Regardless, they always fit the character of the region and are designed to fill gaps and meet the needs of employers in the target industry. In addition, they typically form based on a specific need, and through the success of a particular initiative or activity, the partnerships begin to coalesce and evolve.

Fortunately, the success of a sector initiative is not dependent upon numbers, but rather the strength of relationships across the partner organizations. This is especially fortunate for rural areas; quality over quantity makes sector initiatives a viable and impactful strategy.

Strategy: Add Healthcare to the Region's list of priority industries.

Timeline: Year one

The Regional Prosperity Initiative 5-year plan, developed in 2013, identifies several industries of focus, including Tourism, Local Food, and Wood Products. While all of these industries are key to the success of the region, Healthcare is noticeably absent. This industry boasts the second highest projected increase in jobs in the region for the 2012 to 2022 timeframe. It also provides the most variety of jobs, with several career pathway options. Minimal training is needed to enter the field, and the growth potential for increased earnings and longevity is difficult to find in other industries. There are also opportunities for business start-ups in home health, adult foster care, medical billing, and more.

It is recommended that the region establish talent development and sector initiative efforts in Healthcare. Existing connections with healthcare employers should be leveraged to begin convening a partnership. If healthcare sector groups are already meeting, join them as a resource for talent development. Work with the group to implement focused activities. **Start small, by engaging all partners in a low-risk, high-reward activity, such as development of a resource guide or an asset map.** This will establish relationships and show early successes, which can then expand to additional activities and long-term strategies. Longer-term strategies should include development of Career Pathways and/or USDOL Registered Apprenticeships, as suggested in the Recommendations below.

Strategy: Develop a sector partnership in the wood products industry.

Timeline: Year two

There is already synergy in the wood products industry in Region 3; it is a significant asset to the area. This momentum can be leveraged to meet the needs of local employers within the sector. Education, workforce development, economic development, and employer partners should convene and discuss the benefits of the sector approach, and begin planning talent development activities. The Wood Industry Report created for the RPI 5-year plan is a good place to start, sharing data from this report and discussing some of the goals identified. Also, the group can learn from some of the best practices described in this report.

It is recommended that the Wood Products sector focus on developing Career Pathways for in-demand occupations in the industry. A visual roadmap that clearly delineates the jobs and educational milestones will be especially useful for attracting students to pursue careers in this field; this will make the long-term opportunities both appealing and attainable.

Strategy: Ensure strong connections between sector-based partnerships and workforce development boards.

Timeline: Year three

Workforce development boards, both across the country and locally, exist to guide and direct workforce programming across a local area. Regionally, the boards work together to support employers with their in-demand talent needs. **For sector-based approaches to be successful, workforce boards must be engaged and supportive.** They must believe in the potential of sector partnerships enough to dedicate resources and provide leadership on the approach.

Workforce boards can be well-connected to sector partnerships in a variety of ways. They can ensure that the board has representation from each industry of focus. They can initiate partnerships, and provide resources for staffing the partnerships, if viable. They can work collaboratively to ensure that sector-based approaches are aligned with the board's strategic plans. Sector partnerships can regularly report to the board, ensuring accountability for achieving the outcomes that both have prioritized. Regardless of the means of connection, it is imperative that the workforce boards in Region 3 are well-connected and supportive of sector-based programming.

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Recommendation: Conduct talent development activities using a sector-based approach</i>	
Goal	Select three industries of focus to begin developing sector partnerships within one year. It is recommended that these industries of focus include the wood products industry and healthcare.
Outcome	Collaboratively establishing industries of focus will begin to develop partnerships and will reduce the overwhelming nature of getting started in sector partnerships, making them more attainable.
<i>Strategies: Add Healthcare to the Region’s list of priority industries; Develop a sector partnership in the wood products industry.</i>	
Goal	Create well-established sector partnerships in the healthcare and wood products sectors within two years; establish a partnership in a third priority industry within four years.
Outcome	Partnerships will have structure, goals, and dedicated resources, the nature of which will be locally designed and dependent upon the needs of the industry.
<i>Strategy: Ensure strong connections between sector-based partnerships and workforce development boards.</i>	
Goal	Both workforce boards in Region 3 will have representation from the established sector partnerships within three years, and will actively endorse the partnerships.
Outcome	Workforce programming will align with activities of the sector partnerships.

Recommendation: Increase utilization of USDOL Registered Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship is an effective means of training a skilled workforce, offering benefits to both the worker and the employer. The worker receives instructor-led training and on-the-job training with a skilled mentor. He/she also earns a wage while progressing through training milestones. The employer gains an employee with increasing levels of productivity, and can train each apprentice to the company's specifications. This recommendation leverages the blue-collar culture of the region, emphasizing that work-based, hands-on learning is the most effective means of developing new skills.

The United States Department of Labor now allows a multitude of apprenticeship programs, which are customizable to each employer's needs. These can include time-based or competency-based apprenticeships, or a hybrid of the two. Also, the apprentice's on-the-job mentor does not need to be a registered journeyman; the company designates the best mentor for the skill being taught.

Apprenticeships are available for thousands of occupations, and are no longer solely the realm of the skilled trades. Apprenticeable occupations can include Home Health Care aide, Software Developer, Farmer, and many more. Almost all of the in-demand occupations in Region 3 are apprenticeable. In addition, unions do not need to be involved unless they are already established at the company; creating an apprenticeship at a non-union shop does not in any way predict union activity.

We recommend utilizing the infrastructure developed by sector partnerships in healthcare, wood products, and other industries to establish apprentices. If the sector partnership is new, developing apprenticeships can be one of its first activities. This approach was demonstrated by West Michigan's Medical Assistance Apprenticeship program, cited as one of the Best Practices in this report.

Strategy: Promote USDOL Registered Apprenticeships to local employers

Timeline: Years one and two

Due to the current low utilization and availability of apprenticeship programs, the region should focus on educating local employers, thereby promoting the benefits of this workforce development strategy. It is recommended that a robust regional promotional plan be developed to properly educate employers about apprenticeships. It is anticipated that the promotional plan will include relationship building with local companies through the sector partnerships, apprenticeship representatives on the region's workforce development boards, industry sector coordinators at the State of Michigan's Workforce Development Agency, the USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship, and more.

Strategy: Create a centralized coordination function for USDOL Registered Apprenticeships

Timeline: Year two

A coordination function within the Region can offer the kind of support to local employers that is needed to truly implement effective programming. It is recommended that this function be filled by a dedicated staff position.

A staff position that is focused on apprenticeship programming for the region will ensure that local employers have access to the information and resources they need. A coordinator would not only be the local “go to” expert on how to set-up and manage an apprenticeship, but would also heavily promote apprenticeship. He or she would:

- Get involved in the business community through active participation in sector partnerships;
- Turn current apprenticeship-supporting employers into advocates and champions;
- Assist employers in creating customized programs, including connecting to appropriate postsecondary programs;
- Assist employers in calculating return on investment;
- Work with existing educational programs to develop pre-apprenticeship programming, which will provide employers with a productive employee upon hire;
- Promote apprenticeship in an ongoing fashion, using local information.

Strategy: Ensure long-term, ongoing support of employers and apprentices

Timeline: Year four

The region must be committed to continued support of apprenticeship programming for the long-term. This will require dedicated resources to fund the apprenticeship coordinator position, wrap-around support for apprentices to ensure completion, and ongoing promotion to the community. The sector partnerships should make this issue a regular agenda item at meetings or designate a task force.

- A viable funding model for this position should be developed early in the timeline. Because the coordinator will support the region and his/her work will benefit many stakeholders, the funding model should leverage multiple sources. This could include federal and state workforce funding, educational institutions, employer support, and discretionary grants.
- Wrap-around supportive services for apprentices will ensure retention and completion of the program. This can be provided by a combination of federal workforce funding and employer support.

- Follow-through on documentation of training and communication with USDOL is critical to success for each individual apprenticeship program as well as for the strategy overall.

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Strategy: Promote USDOL Registered Apprenticeships to local employers</i>	
Goal	Develop promotional plan early and focus heavily on promotion for the first two years.
Outcome	Local employers will accurately understand the benefits of apprenticeship and the ways in which it could impact their company.
<i>Strategy: Create a centralized coordination function for USDOL Registered Apprenticeships</i>	
Goal	Work within the sector partnerships to increase the number of USDOL Registered Apprenticeships by 25 programs in ten years, resulting in 150 trained apprentices.
Outcome	These additional work-based training opportunities will be available to workers in the community, and companies will be growing their own skilled workforce.
<i>Strategy: Ensure long-term, ongoing support of employers and apprentices</i>	
Goal	Procure resources to support apprenticeship coordinator and cost of apprenticeship training.
Outcome	Additional funding sufficient to provide effective and high quality services for all aspects of apprenticeship will be available to the region.

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Recommendation: Develop comprehensive Career Pathways systems within sector partnerships

Career Pathways have been defined for Career & Technical Education (CTE) in various ways for decades. In CTE, career pathways represent major occupational clusters, within which students can pursue a number of career options. However, for purposes of this strategy, the term Career Pathways will be defined as follows: “A Career Pathway is the education and training required along with the expected employment outcomes for each level of achievement in a certain industry or occupation” (Pierce College). In addition, the term used in the context of talent development programming implies that wrap-around services will be provided to ensure that the student/worker is able to overcome barriers that could get in the way of completion.

It can be easy to confuse apprenticeships with career pathways. However, they have distinct definitions. Apprenticeships are “automatic” career pathways because they integrate classroom and work-based learning, and offer a progression of milestones for the worker. Career pathways as described here can be much broader, and often require development at a systems level, involving businesses, education providers, Adult Education services, and workforce development.

Career pathways offer job seekers and students a venue for progressing through an industry. They can achieve (and celebrate) accomplishments throughout that progression, often increasing earnings. A well-designed career pathway program gives each individual a personalized roadmap for long-term career planning. **Employers within a sector benefit by ensuring that career pathways systems are designed to train new and potential workers with the skills they need, and to their standards.**

The structure provided by sector partnerships should be used to develop career pathways. The group may want to appoint a committee or focus the energy of the entire partnership on development of career pathways. Be sure that representation from Adult Education and postsecondary institutions are involved, as they will surely play a role in providing training. The group may decide to utilize just one employer who is willing to share information on the career progression options within that company. This will be an effective way to get started and quickly attain tangible outcomes. If multiple employers are interested and willing to participate, the committee will need to find commonalities among the employers in order to develop the career pathway.

Strategy: Create a Career Pathways Roadmap

Timeline: Year one or two (depending on establishment of sector partnership)

We recommend creating the first career pathways system in the wood products industry, but any sector partnership that is interested in this process should begin by creating a roadmap. The roadmap provides a visual representation of the occupations and credentials required to progress through the pathway. To get started, bring in a facilitator to lead the sector partnership group through a discussion that determines the key occupations within the sector. Identify the educational requirements and skills necessary for each occupation. **Lay out the information in a way that visually represents the career pathway.** This exercise is similar to creating an asset map, as it will quickly bring to light any missing training options that could be developed for the region. The roadmap will be very useful to counselors when advising high school students, workforce program staff when advising job seekers, postsecondary institutions when developing programs, and businesses when trying to recruit and show potential for progression. The roadmap can serve as a long-term career planning tool.

We recommend this activity as an initial project for a new sector partnership because it provides a tangible outcome and can be done relatively quickly. The process helps to solidify relationships and gives the group an early success.

Comparable Best Practice: [Get Into Energy Career Pathways Roadmaps](#), Center for Energy Workforce Development

Strategy: Develop training programs where gaps exist

Timeline: Year two

If development of the career pathways roadmap reveals gaps in available training, work with local training institutions to develop them. Several examples of this kind of development have occurred in Region 3, including the timber grading training. **Work collaboratively to brainstorm solutions to potential capacity issues**, and conduct comprehensive marketing to recruit students into the new program. Utilize Michigan Works! to recruit, screen and possibly fund potential trainees.

Strategy: Promote Adult Education programs as an entry into career pathways

Timeline: Year One

Adult Education programming is in a perfect position to jump-start career pathways for adults. Attainment of a GED is the first step in a career pathway. Educating the communities throughout the region about Adult Education services should go beyond advertising for GED completion. Promoting these services should emphasize that basic skills are necessary in order to enter postsecondary education, on-the-job training, and long-term employment.

The Adult Education program should be designed to assist participants with moving into the next phase of the career pathways. Therefore, sector partnerships should make intentional efforts to involve the Adult Education system in developing any new pathways, from providing input on adult learners to offering customized basic academic classes that complement an occupational training program. Their involvement will ensure that career pathways are available for adults as well as youth.

Comparable Best Practice: [Transitioning Adults to Postsecondary Education and Training \(TAPET\)](#)

Strategy: Develop an Employer Resource Network (ERN)

Timeline: Year four or five

Where there is synergy and support, engage the employers who participated in development of the career pathways within their sector to create an Employer Resource Network. An ERN will take the next step beyond credentials and jobs, and set up a collaborative method of providing wrap-around support to employees.

There are several examples of successful ERNs that can be modeled. **The critical element is that workers have access to a neutral source of supportive services that will address potential barriers to employment before they interfere with job success.** The combination of upward mobility within a company, along with the supportive services resources, will improve retention and workplace culture.

The development of an ERN can be time and labor intensive. If this is a priority for the region, early planning will pave the way.

Comparable Best Practice: [Great Lakes Bay Employer Resource Network](#)

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Strategy: Create a Career Pathways Roadmap</i>	
Goal	Create a Career Pathways Roadmap with an established sector partnership by the second year.
Outcome	All stakeholders will have access to a visual representation of the career pathways for long-term career planning purposes.
<i>Strategy: Develop training programs where gaps exist</i>	
Goal	If a new training program is needed, develop and begin offering it within two years.
Outcome	Programs will be available to train the workforce for every milestone within the career pathway.
<i>Strategy: Promote Adult Education programs as an entry into career pathways</i>	
Goal	Create a marketing plan for Adult Education programs, emphasizing their connection to career pathways, within the first year.
Outcome	Enrollment in Adult Education services will increase as communities begin to understand that basic skills, including GED, are an essential first step in any career pathway.
<i>Strategy: Develop an Employer Resource Network (ERN)</i>	
Goal	Develop an Employer Resource Network within five years.
Outcome	Multiple employers will provide access to supportive services so that their workforce will succeed in progressing through the career pathways.

Recommendation: Improve Soft Skills through Work-Based Training

During the input process for this plan, soft skills were clearly identified as a priority issue. Employers, educators, agency representatives, and private citizens all agree that the workforce must be better trained on the kinds of skills that are required for every job, regardless of industry.

There is a multitude of evidence that shows the importance of soft skills. Individuals who are proficient in these skills are more likely to stay persistent when searching for a job; they are also more likely to get hired, excel on the job, and earn more. They succeed in both educational and employment endeavors.¹ Improving these skills among the current and future workforce in the region is paramount to meeting employer needs.

An independent review of multiple studies on soft skills concluded that the most commonly cited, highly desired skills are the following:²

- Social skills
- Communication skills
- Higher order thinking (problem solving, critical thinking skills)
- Self-control
- Positive self-concept

It is these skills that make the difference in whether a person is successful or more likely to fail at education, employment, and personal activities.

Soft skills are critical for employment success, so should be a priority when designing employment and training programs. However, teaching soft skills is a challenge. The common perception is that these types of skills are taught at home, and if a person did not learn them from parents then there is no hope. Learning soft skills in a classroom, with no real practical application, is not nearly as effective as learning them in real-life scenarios, whether at home or on a job.

Fortunately, there are effective and successful programs occurring all over the world that show marked improvement of soft skills. These programs are most often hands-on, work-based experiences. They include immediate feedback from a job coach, and leverage “teaching moments” throughout the workday. **The work-based model is successful because the job coach is positioned as both a supervisor and a trainer - someone who teaches, guides, and encourages soft skill development and success.** Unfortunately, these programs are labor-intensive and expensive; they are often funded through government grants and some private donations, and take an immense amount of administrative effort to develop and maintain.

¹ *Workforce Connections: Key Soft Skills that Foster Youth Workforce Success*, Child Trends, Inc., 2015.

² *Ibid.*

This recommendation takes the effectiveness of these programs, and transfers the coaching role to the business community. Work-based learning is best conducted *at work*, so we ask businesses to step up and take part in the solution to this challenge. The following strategies ask businesses to take more work experience, co-op, and internship placements; intentionally train the student/worker on soft skills; and work collaboratively with the workforce agencies and educational systems to raise the standard for soft skill development and attainment. The strategies also provide the structure needed for businesses to succeed in this new role. We recommend utilizing the framework established through sector partnerships to begin implementation.

Strategy: Build soft skills training into the structure of work experience programs

Timeline: Year one

Several entities in the region utilize work experience programming for educational and workforce development purposes. A job seeker or student is “placed” in a business or non-profit agency to work on a temporary assignment. These programs include Work Experience Programs for youth and disadvantaged populations through Michigan Works; co-op programs at high schools and career and technical education; and college-level internships. The purpose of any of these programs is to give the student or job seeker an opportunity to spend time in a work environment, learning both the occupational skills as well as the cultural and often unspoken workplace skills that are so necessary for success. **This strategy takes those “unspoken” workplace skills and makes them spoken and intentional.**

Most of these programs already utilize a student/worker review form. The work experience supervisor (usually the point of contact at the company) completes the form on a regular basis. The review addresses items such as punctuality, attitude, appearance, and job skills. The completed form is used as a way to determine if a person is job ready. However, the form can also help the supervisor with specifically training the person where it’s needed. Including other training-oriented structural elements in the work experience program will build the structure we recommend, such as:

- The supervisor should provide immediate feedback when the student/worker does well and when he/she is deficient.
- A curriculum should be developed to ensure that soft skills are taught during the work experience placement. The curriculum can be laid out in an easy-to-follow plan so the supervisor is given the tools needed to act as a job coach. There are many programs available that provide soft skills curriculum for classroom instruction; we recommend conducting research to determine which of these could best be adapted to a workplace environment.

- An assessment proving attainment of soft skills should be conducted at the end of the work experience placement. A certificate of achievement can be provided to the student as evidence of his/her learning.

Comparable Best Practice: [ROCA](#) Transitional Jobs program, Boston MA

Strategy: Train work experience supervisors

Timeline: Years two through ten

Once the training structure and appropriate curriculum is developed (above), conduct trainings with work experience supervisors. Gather several company representatives via an established sector partnership to conduct the training. Give them the skills they need to *teach* soft skills to others. This training will guide them through the process of recognizing the errors in judgement that so often occur among people who don't have soft skills. Rather than *passing* judgement and simply marking the person down on the review form, the supervisor will be equipped to show the worker an appropriate skill instead. The training will also teach the supervisor how to use "teachable moments," implement curriculum, and assess competence in each skill.

We do not know of any existing program for teaching work experience site supervisors how to train on soft skills. However, a skilled educator or strategist could utilize available soft skills curriculum and modify it for this purpose. We feel that this strategy is imperative to the successful implementation of the recommendation; **teaching soft skills in a work environment requires skilled, dedicated individuals at the worksite.**

Strategy: Increase the quantity of work experience placements

Timeline: Years three through ten

With the new training-oriented work experience model, and skilled work site supervisors, more companies and non-profits throughout the region should take work experience, co-op, and internship placements. This is a community-wide endeavor; businesses should see how much of a difference they can make in helping people improve their soft skills. The sector partnership groups can work together to increase the number of overall placements.

In order to recruit more companies to take placements, we suggest the following:

- Develop success stories of work experience placements who have graduated to full-time, permanent positions and share these stories widely.
- Maintain data on work experience successes to show potential businesses the impact it has on individuals as well as the workforce.
- Entice more business participation through local civic groups, such as rotary, Kiwanis, and optimists clubs. The businesspeople who participate in these groups are there because they are committed to giving back to the community; what better way to do that than to teach a young person or disadvantaged person how to be a better worker?

As with all programs, the entities coordinating work experience programs have costs associated with each placement. Michigan Works! agencies pay the wages for youth placements, educational institutions usually have an internship coordinator who works directly with companies to place individuals in program-related jobs. The costs for increasing numbers in these programs can be mitigated by partnering with companies and local foundations. For instance, Michigan Works! agencies can split the cost of wages with the companies who take placements, rather than paying the entire wage. The economy is ripe for such an arrangement, since so many businesses are desperately seeking entry level workers. Costs for coordination of programs can be supported through grants from government, local foundations, or civic groups.

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Strategy: Build soft skills training into the structure of work experience programs</i>	
Goal	Develop the curriculum and training structure for work experience programs within one year.
Outcome	Work experience programming will provide intentional, systematic, and high-quality soft skills training.
<i>Strategy: Conduct training with companies who take students and job seekers for work experience placements</i>	
Goal	Develop the training program and begin delivery during the second year. Conduct one training per year, ongoing.
Outcome	Work experience supervisors will have the skills needed to teach soft skills to students and workers during the program.
<i>Strategy: Increase the quantity work experience placements</i>	
Goal	Recruit 50 additional companies for work experience, co-op, and internship placements within five years. Continue recruiting through the last five years.

Outcome	The companies will offer soft skills training through work-based learning through a variety of work experience programs.

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Entrepreneurship

Our final set of recommended strategies involves developing stronger infrastructure to train and encourage entrepreneurs. Laying this foundation involves short-term goals and action-steps, but long-term results. Increasing entrepreneurial activity will not only increase opportunities in the region, it will begin to show the community the importance of entrepreneurship.

The culture of the region is and has historically been focused on blue-collar work; therefore, entrepreneurship is not front of mind for many people. There are many ways to change the culture in favor of entrepreneurship. Many of the strategies recommended here will do just that: entrepreneurs will begin to hold higher status, risk aversion will be mitigated, and young people will experience early successes that encourage future small business endeavors.

Region 3 has support systems in place for entrepreneurship and business growth. However, these systems should be connected, coordinated, and their capacity increased. We believe that the region is perfectly positioned for explosive growth in small business activity. With the proper infrastructure and support network, small businesses will be more likely to succeed and improve the economy of the whole region.

In order to ensure focused activity and sustainability, **we recommend creating a Regional Entrepreneurial Collaborative to oversee the implementation of these strategies.** It can be a subcommittee of the RPI Collaborative or a stand-alone. The group should consist of representation from all entrepreneurship programs and business support entities in the region, such as entrepreneurial youth programs, Small Business Development Center, any CDFIs covering the region, and SCORE. The group will be charged with working collaboratively to implement the strategies recommended here, and achieving the appropriate goals and outcomes. In addition, this will ensure that the entrepreneurs who develop as a result of these strategies are well-connected to the resources available in the region.

Recommendation: Increase Awareness about Entrepreneurship

Why is entrepreneurship important? What kind of impact can it have on an individual, community, region? How do the benefits outweigh the initial risk and investment? The focus of this recommendation is to educate the communities in Region 3 about why entrepreneurship is important. This will begin to change people's perceptions about their ability to start a business. The region should leverage the patriotic, blue-collar culture by emphasizing the importance of small business to the economy. **Residents will begin to see starting a business as the ultimate patriotic activity: small business is the backbone of American vitality.**

Strategy: Hold an Entrepreneurship Summit

Timeline: Years one and two

After establishing the regional entrepreneurial collaborative tasked with overseeing this plan, their first activity should be to hold an Entrepreneurship Summit in the region. The summit will act as a catalyst for entrepreneurial activity. The event should include the following, at a minimum:

- A patriotic theme: "Entrepreneurs Built America" or "Entrepreneurship in Small Town America."
- Breakout activities that are designed to kick-start the strategies included in this recommendation.
- Local media involvement before, during and after, to promote the event and begin to spread awareness about the benefits of entrepreneurship.
- A mini pitch session, which will give attendees a real experience in this sort of competition.
- A youth track: involve youth programs in designing breakout activities specifically designed for youth. Work with local schools to select youth attendees.
- A high-profile keynote speaker to attract attendance, i.e. the CEO of a major company, the governor of the state of Michigan, etc.

We recommend dedicating resources to hire a facilitator who can develop the agenda, find speakers, and plan the activities. This will ensure that the proper time and commitment is given to planning the event, and increase the likelihood that it will be a great success.

Comparable Best Practice: the Diamond Challenge [Youth Entrepreneurship Summit](#)

Strategy: Develop an “Entrepreneurial Success” Campaign

Timeline: Years two through ten

Continuing with the patriotic theme, create a medium for spreading the word about entrepreneurship in Region 3. Feature local entrepreneurs who are successful. Share information and resources. Discuss great strategies for starting a business along with helpful tips and ideas. This can all be conducted via an email newsletter, a column in local papers, and/or additional events. A specific entity should be designated with implementing this activity, for sustainability and accountability purposes.

Strategy: Conduct Pitch Events Throughout the Region on a Regular Basis

Timeline: Years three through ten

Although this strategy will provide investment and other resources to small businesses, most pitch events do not provide *significant* financial support to start-ups. They offer a small prize that incentivizes participation in the event. Primarily, these competitions energize a community in support of start-ups. They usually get a lot of attention from local media, schools, agencies, and businesses. They build awareness about the resources available. **Pitch events offer a stage from which new or established entrepreneurs can serve as role models for aspiring entrepreneurs.**

Holding a pitch event is labor-intensive and time-consuming. The most successful ones also come with support to prepare in advance, such as classes or a bootcamp. Therefore, the Regional Entrepreneurial Collaborative should put substantial planning into this strategy. Implementation will require many partners and financial support from sponsors and donors. We recommend developing a detailed plan that includes specific action steps, targeted partners, dates, locations, and resources. The plan should include review of existing pitch models. It will be most effective to bring in a program that already exists, rather than trying to create something new. A successful model is that of the MSU Spartan Innovations Center “Green Light” competition. They will partner with communities across the state to conduct regional competitions; the winners advance to the state level.

Comparable Best Practice: [Green Light Port Huron](#)

Recommendation: Increase entrepreneurial programming for youth

This recommendation has the added benefit of teaching young people all of the soft skills referred to in the previous recommendation. Entrepreneurial skills are much the same as soft skills, and teaching them helps to prepare young people for success as a citizen and employee as well.

Entrepreneurship education leads to a number of positive outcomes. **Young people who participate in entrepreneurship programming improve their academic performance, attendance at school, and educational attainment.** They have better interpersonal relationships, money management skills, and problem-solving abilities. They are more job-ready than young people who do not take part in entrepreneurship education.³ We believe that more entrepreneurial experience at a young age will improve the region's overall perceptions about starting a small business.

Strategy: Partner with an established program to deliver entrepreneurial programming to youth

Timeline: Year One

Rather than attempt to create something new, we recommend finding a youth-focused entrepreneurial program with proven success. Many programs exist, from free online curriculum to full-fledged training programs.

One of the challenges involved in delivering this type of program is the participation of schools. With so many requirements and demands on classroom time, teachers and principals are reluctant to bring in additional programming. It can also be difficult to offer after-school activities, since there are so many already in place. Therefore, it is imperative that schools be involved in selecting a program, in order to ensure that it will meet their needs. In fact, it's important to start working with one school at a time, with a goal of establishing programming in various schools throughout the region over time.

Another challenge is that of funding. In order to be successful, resources must be dedicated to coordinate, build relationships, and recruit volunteers. We recommend beginning with one willing community by partnering with a donor and school. This success will then serve as a model for other communities.

³ D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, 2001.

One program that is finding great success working within classrooms is Junior Achievement. The national program has developed curriculum that meets common core requirements. Teachers don't have to find time for the program as an "add-on," it can actually fulfill some of the items that must be taught in their classroom. The Junior Achievement model uses well-written materials and kits that volunteers can easily pick up and lead in a classroom. Volunteers often come from the business community, and are readily found through community-based civic groups.

Comparable Best Practice: [Oscoda County Achieves](#)

Goals and Outcomes

<i>Strategy: Hold an Entrepreneurship Summit</i>	
Goal	Hold a high-profile Entrepreneurship Summit during year two.
Outcome	Region 3 will be exposed to a wealth of entrepreneurial activity, and the entrepreneurship strategies in this report will be launched.
<i>Strategy: Develop an "Entrepreneurial Success" Campaign</i>	
Goal	Develop the template for the campaign as part of the Entrepreneurship Summit during year two. Maintain the campaign years three through ten.
Outcome	Region 3 will be exposed to successful entrepreneurship endeavors, and learn the benefits of entrepreneurship for the individual, community, and region.
<i>Strategy: Conduct Pitch Events Throughout the Region on a Regular Basis</i>	
Goal	Develop a plan for holding pitch events by year three. Hold one pitch event per year in each major population center for years four through ten.
Outcome	Start-ups will gain the opportunity to receive investment, mentorship, and other support; communities will become more aware of entrepreneurial activity.
<i>Strategy: Partner with an established program to deliver entrepreneurial programming to youth</i>	
Goal	Work with one willing school district and one donor to select a program and begin delivery of the program by the second year.
Outcome	Build programming and funding to establish a program in the school districts of all major population centers within ten years.

RESOURCES

The recommended strategies in this report will require numerous supportive resources. These can include informational resources from entities that have conducted research, developed plans and templates, and/or established successful initiatives. It can also include financial support from public and private grants, community donations, and/or fee-for-service activities. The resources listed here represent all of these and more, and should serve as support and guidance when implementing our recommendations.

Talent Attraction Resources

[“Five Big Marketing Ideas for Rural and Small Communities”](#) from DCI, an international marketing firm that specializes in promoting places. They give suggestions and examples of how to connect with college seniors at targeted universities, reach former residents who may be thinking about coming back, and more.

[“Recruiting Talent to Unglamorous Places”](#) from ERE Media. This is an old article - from 2003 - but the reverse marketing strategies are very valid today, especially as Region 3 begins to identify its target audience.

[“The Science of Talent Attraction: Understanding What Makes People Click.”](#) This presentation (in PDF form) shares the results of comprehensive research conducted by *Indeed*, the immensely popular job search web site. They talk about the sociology and psychology of the job search, what makes people pursue a new job, and why they would consider moving to a different location.

[“Talent Attraction Denmark.”](#) This web site highlights the job opportunities and lifestyle available in Denmark. They focus on quality of life and work-life balance. The video on the home page features several transplants from around the world who have found happiness in their careers and family life in Denmark.

[“The Next Generation of Live, Work, Play.”](#) This article presents a new understanding about the generational shift from traditional employment to a focus on place, technology, and social amenities. It highlights a study regarding the effectiveness of creating an urban development in a rural setting.

Talent Development Resources – Sector Partnerships

[Colorado Sector Partnerships and Career Pathways](#): The state of Colorado has committed its workforce development systems to using sector-based approaches, and has led the country in their development.

[Sector Essentials Planning Guide](#), Insight Center for Community Economic Development: Creating sector partnerships takes planning and relationship development. Some initial research on how best to go about creating them is time well spent. This resource offers guidance on the components of sector partnerships and the information needed to begin.

[Sector Essentials Funding Guide](#), Insight Center for Community Economic Development: This guide describes various mixes of funding sources that can support sector partnerships and their activities. It also suggests funding sources to pursue.

[Application of Industry Cluster-Based and Sector-Focused Strategies to Rural Economies](#), Corporation for a Skilled Workforce: This white paper explores the effectiveness and applicability of sector-based approaches in rural areas. A tremendous resource of information, best practices, and insights, it is worth the read for anyone researching sector partnerships.

Financial Resources for Sector Partnerships

Sector Partnerships National Emergency Grants, United States DOL ETA: Available to states and awarded to Michigan in April 2015, the SP NEG is already in use in Region 3. Aligning its activities with the planning and development of sector partnerships as recommended in this report may be a practical strategy. Future National Emergency Grants (now re-named National Dislocated Worker Grants) will likely require or incentivize use of sector-based approaches.

US DOL ETA - other discretionary grants: Many grants available from the US DOL ETA encourage or require sector-based approaches. It is recommended that Region 3 dedicate resources to watching for these opportunities and evaluating the feasibility of pursuing them when available.

Workforce Development Agency, Talent Investment Agency, State of Michigan: The agency responsible for workforce development funding in Michigan, along with workforce policy, direction, and strategy, is committed to supporting local sector-based initiatives. Funding may be available specifically for sector approaches in the near future.

Membership fees: Some sector partnerships maintain the coordination function by paying fees to a backbone agency, which then provides staffing and support.

Talent Development Resources – Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship USA Toolkit: This toolkit provides a wide range of information about apprenticeship, including online trainings in the form of webinars and tutorials, FAQs, and strategy recommendations. It also offers an assessment and planning tool for workforce systems.

USDOL’s Shareables: This website provides graphics to use on social media, as well as nicely designed printable fact sheets.

Apprenticeship Week Report: This report shares the activities and outcomes of a national week dedicated to promotion of apprenticeship. It provides best practices and ideas that can be adapted for Region 3.

Apprenticeship Programs and Advocacy - Workforce Development Agency: This web site provides information about registered apprenticeship programs throughout the state of Michigan. This includes the Detroit Registered Apprenticeship Program (D-RAP), Advanced Manufacturing Partnership (AMP) of Grand Rapids, and the Software Developer Apprenticeship Program (SDAP) of Grand Traverse. Advocacy efforts are also listed, and includes the Michigan Apprenticeship Steering Committee, Inc. (MASCI), listed below.

Michigan Apprenticeship Steering Committee, Inc. (MASCI): This committee advises the state’s Bureau of Apprenticeship Training, provides a forum for apprenticeship advocacy, and consists of membership from public, labor, industry, government, and education sectors.

Financial Resources for Apprenticeships

Skilled Trades Training Fund: This funding source provides training dollars to companies for in-demand skills, upgrading their workforce, and training new hires. Companies may apply through their Michigan Works! Agency.

Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act, including National Dislocated Worker Grants; Trade Act (all variations); PATH: These federal workforce training funds are based on eligibility and suitability of the job seeker. Training must result in an industry-recognized credential; a USDOL Registered Apprenticeship certificate meets this requirement.

GI Bill: Veterans in an approved apprenticeship program receive a stipend for living expenses while in the program.

Discretionary Grants: Grants from the USDOL and/or US Department of Education are sometimes available to fund apprenticeship. These opportunities have been especially prevalent given the presidential and congressional commitment to work-based employment and training. Programs include the American Apprenticeship Initiative, Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations, and State Accelerator Grants.

[Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeship](#): This comprehensive document compiles numerous financial resources to support development and implementation of registered apprenticeship programs, including some of the funding venues listed here. Links to additional resources are also provided.

Private Foundations: Local and/or statewide private foundations may be tapped to fund training or perhaps a pilot effort for implementation of this strategy. Additional research should be conducted to determine which foundations would be most receptive to this type of funding.

Talent Development Resources – Career Pathways

[National Career Pathways Network](#) (NCPN): A program of the Center for Occupational Research and Development, the NCPN provides toolkits, strategies, supports, and leadership in developing effective career pathways systems. The most useful resources for Region 3 may be: Advisory Committee Toolkit, Adult Career Pathways Toolkit, and Featured Project Resources.

[Workforce GPS Career Pathways Community of Practice](#): Previously named Workforce3one, this DOL-sponsored web site allows practitioners of career pathways programs to connect, learn about new policies and programs, and participate in training opportunities.

[Jobs to Careers: Transforming the Front Lines of Healthcare](#): This was a national effort funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and implemented at 17 sites across the country, including five rural areas. The report shares insights and valuable examples from the process.

Talent Development Resources – Soft Skills and Work Experience Programs

The [Center for Work Ethic Development](#) is a well-known and respected organization that specializes in soft skills training. Their research has led to the development of a classroom-based program called “Take you’re a Game to Work.” Although we recommend teaching soft skills through work experience as a more effective strategy, the Center for Work Ethic Development has seen success in implementing this classroom program across the country.

[“Engaging Youth in Work Experiences: An Innovative Strategies Practice Brief”](#) from the National Council on Workforce and Disability. This report shares insights from several effective programs across the country. It presents the most effective strategies and ultimately, the value of work experience programming.

[Mathematica Policy Research’s report on Employer Resource Networks:](#) This report describes the Employer Resource Network (ERN) model, including key partnerships, service providers, and features and benefits of an ERN. Research is based on the programs implemented across Michigan.

Examples of Career Pathways Roadmaps:

- Portland Community College www.pcc.edu/career/pathways/options/roadmaps.html
- Get Into Energy (Center for Energy Workforce Development) www.cewd.org/roadmap/

[“Why Soft Skills Matter”](#) by MindTools. This online resource provides numerous articles and tutorials on a variety of topics. Their Soft Skills collection includes negotiation, conflict resolution, communication, creative thinking, and more.

Entrepreneurship Resources

The [Center for Rural Entrepreneurship](#) is dedicated to helping rural communities across the country develop entrepreneurial strategies. They offer tools for building awareness and conducting an entrepreneurial assessment for the region. They also offer downloadable resources for a nominal fee, webinars and other trainings. You can use these free and low-cost resources or a community can contract with the organization.

[Small Biz Survival](#) is the online “small town and rural business resource.” It is primarily a blog that shares innovative strategies, best practices, and highlights from rural communities around the country.

[Building a Regional Entrepreneurship Network](#) is a guide for communities to use when creating a collaborative support system for entrepreneurs. It includes case studies, worksheets, suggested strategies, and a readiness assessment.

Financial Resources for Entrepreneurship

[Strong Rural America Rural Entrepreneurship Challenge](#) from Farm Bureau. This is a national pitch competition for rural entrepreneurs in food and agriculture businesses.

[Regional Innovation Strategies grants](#) from the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. These funds are available for regions to create or expand innovation-driven entrepreneurship and business development programs. Although rural areas are rarely listed in the awards, a strong case can be made for need. Most past winners are economic development agencies or colleges.

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