



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

STRATEGIC PLAN

November 2016

Acknowledgements

This strategic plan was created through a collaborative effort of the West Michigan Works! Workforce Development Board, Area Community Services Employment and Training Council (ACSET) Governing Board, and the Boards' staff, with valuable input from the region's stakeholders representing community partners, education and training providers, economic development, employers, and jobseekers. The Board thanks all individuals and organizations who took time to attend input sessions and respond to surveys to make this plan as strong and comprehensive as it could be, and looks forward to continuing the conversation to strengthen workforce development in West Michigan.

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Introduction

The West Michigan Works! Workforce Development Board oversees services in seven West Michigan counties, including Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, and Ottawa. In previous years, these counties were served by four separate Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs), each with similar programs, but different processes, approaches, and customer bases. In an effort to take a more regional approach to workforce development and service delivery in West Michigan, West Michigan Works! was formed, consolidating three MWAs and bringing in two counties from a fourth to cover all seven counties. This regional approach allowed a decrease in administrative overhead and duplication of services, as well as a focus on streamlined processes and consistency for the region's customers.

This reorganization presents an opportunity to take a fresh look at the regional workforce development landscape and services and to create a unified strategy for moving forward. In March of 2016, this strategic planning process was initiated to establish a clear vision, mission, and strategy for West Michigan Works! with input from stakeholders from across all seven counties. Over the course of five months, hundreds of stakeholders—including community partners, education and training partners, economic development, employers, jobseekers, staff, and board members from all seven counties—were engaged and provided input on the direction and strategic issues and opportunities for West Michigan Works! moving forward.

The strategic planning process and resulting strategic plan is described in the following pages. From the input and strategic discussions, mission, vision, and values statements, as well as goals and strategies were established. The plan also contains recommendations for implementation and monitoring progress throughout the life of the plan.

Strategic Planning Process

The West Michigan Works! Workforce Development Board undertook this strategic planning process from June to October 2016 to build a workforce strategy that balances a regional vision with local implementation and action. The process began with information gathering through community input sessions and stakeholder surveys to provide the board with feedback related to pressing workforce issues and opportunities. This information was presented to the Board through a series of planning sessions, described below, resulting in the creation of mission, vision, and values statements and goals, strategies, and implementation recommendations.

Community Input Sessions

Fourteen input sessions were held across the region, one each with employers and community partners in every county. More than 120 participants attended these sessions and gave feedback on a variety of topics related to the local labor market and workforce development services. Examples of topics discussed in these sessions are listed below

Employers

- Employer challenges and opportunities
- Availability of workforce development and training services
- Workforce needs and skills gaps

Community Partners

- Local workforce system strengths and gaps
- Community partner collaboration
- Opportunities for improvement of services
- Vision for the local workforce development system

Stakeholder Surveys

To gain input from a wider array of community members than those who could make it to the input sessions, six separate surveys were developed for different stakeholder groups. The groups surveyed included:

- Education and Training Providers
- Community Partners
- Employers and Chambers of Commerce
- Jobseekers
- West Michigan Works! Management and Staff
- Workforce Development and Governing Boards

All were asked similar questions to those posed during the community input sessions, with additional details included about the experiences respondents had with West Michigan Works! Education and community partners were asked about opportunities for collaboration, while employers and jobseekers were asked to rate their experiences and satisfaction with the services offered by West Michigan Works! Management and staff provided insights into how well they feel they are prepared to provide high quality services and opportunities they see for improvement. The final survey for the Workforce Development and Governing Boards asked board members to weigh in on elements making up a mission and vision statement, as well as the strategic issues they would like to see addressed in the strategic plan.

Board and Executive Committee Planning Sessions

Three meetings were held with the full Board and/or the Executive Committee to frame the strategic plan and build out its elements. The contents of these three sessions are described below.

Session 1: The first session kicked off the development of the foundational elements of the strategic plan, including discussion around the mission, vision, and values statements as well as the Board's core competencies. The Board also discussed its goals for strategic planning and what it hoped to gain by the end of the process.

Session 2: The second planning session was held after the community input sessions and stakeholder surveys were completed. Findings from these information gathering activities were presented to the Board, along with themes and priorities for action that were identified by participants. The Board discussed potential goals and strategies related to these themes and how it could use its lane of influence and core competencies to most effectively impact the identified issues.

Session 3: The third planning session was held with the Executive Committee and included a presentation of potential plan elements based on all of the previous discussions and feedback. This included draft mission, vision, and values statements as well as articulated core competencies, goals, and strategies. Executive Committee members provided feedback and molded these elements to begin a draft plan for presentation to the full Board.

Key Findings from Community Input Sessions

This section summarizes common themes identified across multiple community and employer input sessions (focus groups). These themes represent feedback, resources, and needs common among more than one session.

Full results from the input sessions can be found in Appendix A.

Related to Workforce

There is a shortage of an available workforce overall, but especially to fill a variety of skilled trade industrial positions, such as Tool & Die Makers, Machinists, Electricians, Mechanics, and Maintenance jobs as well as health care positions—especially Certified Nurse’s Assistants (CNAs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs).

Many workers are willing to (and do) travel between counties for employment. Some groups remarked 50% or more of their workers are employed outside of their county of residence. The transient nature of some vocations, especially in health care, was echoed during multiple employer input sessions where larger employers are “sharing” or “trading” the same workers back and forth due to those workers willingness to commute within the region for slightly higher wages.

Nearly all groups reiterated a need for increased career awareness, including earlier exposure to in-demand opportunities and aptitude/interest assessments in secondary schools. More exposure to “hot jobs” would be beneficial for students, parents, and educators, as there is a bias toward a four-year university pathway and a lack of awareness of available occupations in the region. Talent Tours were encouraged—especially for parents and educators—to provide firsthand, behind-the-scenes experiences with local in-demand businesses and industries. Talent Tours are held on-site at an employer’s facility and offer students, parents, and educators the opportunity to see local industries firsthand, learn about their work, and experience a day in the life of workers in different occupations.

With very low unemployment rates throughout the region—lowest in Ottawa at 3.0% and highest in Muskegon with 4.7%¹—some employers are investing in “growing their own” talent pipeline. In addition to time and resource constraints on internal training development, retaining punctual and dependable employees has been a challenge. A sizeable portion of job applicants and new hires have one or more barriers to employment, often needing wrap around or case management services.

For more skilled and experienced occupations, a number of companies, particularly in manufacturing, employ an aging workforce who are approaching retirement. Succession planning is generally being addressed through flexible retirement arrangements (flex initiatives) and apprenticeship or internship mentoring, albeit with mixed results.

Many groups discussed two persistent workforce needs: short-term training and wrap-around services to help fill immediate job openings as well as a longer-term, systems-oriented approach to engage and train the Region’s future workforce.

¹ As of May, 2016. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/data.htm>

Related to Wrap Around Resources

Transportation—specifically the lack of a regional transit system—was identified as a barrier to retaining employees. Public transportation, where available, usually stops at the county line and does not always accommodate 2nd and 3rd shift employees. Child care was also mentioned as an employment barrier.

A lack of affordable housing, including rental options and apartment units, was identified as a barrier to workforce recruitment. Internet access, especially broadband, is not uniformly available throughout the region and often unavailable for many rural county homes.

Strengths: What is Going Well

- Overall quality of life – the region is a great place to raise a family and/or retire
- Low cost of living and reasonable commute times
- Strong regional medical system – beneficial when attracting workers and employers
- Skills Training Fund – has helped train employees in certifiable/transferable skills
- Tourism, especially for coastal communities
- Intermediate School Districts (ISDs)
- Early college, dual credit, and apprenticeship programs
- Training options through community colleges

Weaknesses: Opportunities for Growth

1. More access to information across the workforce system, ensuring:
 - Employers know which services and funds are available to them
 - Education knows what training employers need
 - Community-based Organizations know what each other are doing (mission and activities)
 - Labor market information is shared / more available to all
2. Continued soft skills curriculum and training, especially around:
 - Communication and eye contact
 - Teamwork and conflict resolution
 - Attendance and punctuality
 - Appropriate behavior for workplace (e.g. texting)
3. Additional Adult Basic Education, especially for:
 - Elementary math (reading and converting decimals and fractions, ex: can read a tape measurer)
 - Basic literacy
 - English as a second language
4. Apprenticeships and employer based training:
 - Montcalm Community College is very responsive to industry needs, Grand Rapids also had positive feedback, Muskegon could improve employer-based training options
 - Some health care apprenticeships have a more streamlined process than other occupations, where employers sign an agreement/memorandum of understanding with MI Works! and the workforce agency coordinates state-level requirements.

Key Findings from Surveys

Common themes and statements from the surveys are summarized by stakeholder audience.

Full results from each of the surveys can be found in Appendix B.

Employers and Chambers of Commerce

A large proportion of Employer and Chamber survey respondents (44%) represented the Manufacturing industry, while more than one-third of the 66 respondent companies are located or provide services in Kent (25), Ottawa (24), and Allegan (24) Counties. A lack of an available labor force, both qualified and entry level candidates, was the most frequently identified need and a challenge to business growth.

More specifically, there was a pronounced need for engineering, machine, and maintenance skilled trade occupations as well as nursing occupations—especially Registered Nurses, Certified Nursing Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses. Many of these occupations are anticipated to remain a need for employers over the next five years. As workers retire, manufacturing respondents also identified succession planning as a future need and predict a large number of openings over the next five to ten years.

While the majority (60%) were not familiar with the West Michigan Works! Board itself, a greater majority (83%) have used Michigan Works! services at least once.

Community Partners

Many of the 14 Community Partners stated the connections, communications, and willingness to share knowledge among agencies were working well in the workforce development system. Collaboration and communication were observed as the most common elements contributing to this effectiveness. Increased involvement with Michigan Works! was viewed as an opportunity to expand collaboration among local organizations while competition for resources and funding was a frequently identified obstacle.

Education & Training Providers

Fifty-five percent (55%) of the 11 education and training providers responding to the survey most frequently engaged with West Michigan Works! by partnering to develop or provide training options. Increased access to information, through online portals, resource databases, additional dialogue, and in-demand job lists, was identified as an opportunity for further collaboration and/or engagement between the workforce system and providers.

Jobseekers

Of the 111 individuals responding, jobseekers most frequently found out about services available from Michigan Works! through the Unemployment Insurance Agency, although many also discovered services online and by walking in. Pure Michigan Talent Connect was the most common service received, followed by unemployment claim assistance, and access to the resource center. There was some inconsistency among jobseekers who had visited different Service Centers with the quality of service and helpfulness they experienced in finding their preferred work. There was also some inconsistency based on the level of work respondents were seeking; those expressing frustrations or less success with the services received often cited that they had been looking for higher-skilled, professional positions.

West Michigan Works! Management and Staff

Customer service—particularly with respect to jobseekers services—and staff, especially Employer Services, were commonly identified as working well within the Service Centers. Continued focus on staff development (training) and more streamlined, efficient processes were identified as opportunities to improve service delivery for jobseekers, while increased communication and outreach/marketing were areas to improve service delivery to employers. Staff and Management frequently learned about available resources for employers and jobseekers from co-workers (including other departments), the internet, word of mouth, and from community partners.

Workforce Development and Governing Boards

When asked, “what one strategic issue do you recommend the Board focus its energy on in the next 3-5 years?,” engaging employers and connecting with the K-12 system were the most commonly mentioned. Potential barriers or challenges outside of the Board’s control that could hinder the planning process often included funding (state and federal), the economy more broadly, and changes to the political landscape. The most important values of the Board centered on innovation, customer/service and responsiveness, community, and collaboration.

Strategic Plan

The first step in the strategic planning process was to define the Board's Mission, Vision, and Values statements to serve as a foundation and guiding principles for creating goals and strategies. The mission statement defines why the Board exists and the work it carries out, while the vision statement describes the results of the Board's efforts if it is successful in carrying out its mission and implementing its strategic plan. The values statements guide the Board's priorities in how it desires to conduct business.

Mission

To lead workforce development strategy and resource alignment in West Michigan by understanding the talent needs of employers and employment needs of jobseekers and connecting them to solutions.

Vision

West Michigan Works! is an employer-recognized model of high quality service that convenes an aligned network of partners, cultivates a skilled workforce, and meets the needs of employers.

Values

Integrity

Providing administrative and fiscal oversight to ensure responsibility and accountability of the organization. Promoting values, honesty, and transparency in communication and action.

Diversity and Inclusion

Serving a diverse population of customers – jobseekers across all demographics and skill levels, and employers regardless of industry, geographic location, or size. The Board and staff support a culture of embracing values and leveraging diversity through representation that reflects the diverse community and economy we serve.

Collaboration

Convening workforce development system partners to promote an inclusive network for aligned resources and solutions. Building relationships with individuals and organizations to form partnerships.

Exceptional Customer Service

Promoting consistent, professional, and high quality customer service throughout all West Michigan Works! centers to exceed the expectations of businesses and jobseekers. Ensuring that customers feel heard and valued and that they are at an advantage due to receiving our services.

Commitment to Community

Working in the best interest of the community. Understanding the unique local needs of West Michigan communities, while leveraging regional resources and connections to increase quality and opportunity.

Data-Driven Action

Continuously tracking metrics to understand quality of service provided and impact on the community. Utilizing data to drive decisions and action.

Continuous Improvement

Encouraging innovation to find solutions that will continuously raise the bar. Promoting responsiveness and agility to adjust based on outcomes.

West Michigan Workforce Development Ecosystem

The full picture of workforce development in West Michigan is much bigger than West Michigan Works! The Workforce Development Board views effective workforce development from a system perspective, including a broader set of partners and stakeholders across workforce development, economic development, education, community services, and philanthropy—all with a role to play in serving employers' workforce needs and jobseekers' employment needs.



Each of these entities has its own set of competencies and strengths, and to maximize the reach and effectiveness of the system as a whole, it is important to play to these strengths in collaborative efforts. Throughout the strategic planning process, the Board and Executive Committee discussed at length how best West Michigan Works! fits into this ecosystem, and its “lane” for contributing to region-wide collaboration and initiatives.

The key roles of West Michigan Works! in the larger ecosystem include:

- Being the ears to the ground to understand the issues related to workforce development and identify needs for policy changes
- Being the boots on the ground to implement solutions to address identified talent issues
- Coordinating partners to minimize duplication of services and maximize collective resources

West Michigan Works! strengths lie particularly in being close to employer and jobseeking customers through direct service delivery, while still being connected to a broader strategic vision through the Workforce Development Board. The Board is in the unique position of bringing together individuals from a variety of entities to identify needs and gaps of the workforce development system and its customers, and making connections to promote collaborative and innovative solutions.

West Michigan Works! Core Competencies

To define its place in the workforce development system even more specifically, the Board and Executive Committee identified the core competencies of West Michigan Works! These are the functions of the organization that represent its capabilities and areas of expertise and will be the tools the Board can use to drive action toward the goals and strategies that are laid out in this strategic plan. The five core competencies include convening and connecting, gathering and disseminating information, outreach and communication, career coaching and assessment, and placement and retention. Additional details of the roles that West Michigan Works! can play within each of these competencies are described below.

Convening and connecting

- Create a network of partners and opportunities to come together to collaborate
- Act as a hub for connecting organizations to others doing the same work or who can fill gaps
- Convene conversations about strategic issues that affect employers' ability to grow and maintain a strong workforce
- Lead the convening of industry councils focused on the talent needs of employers
- Align resources (funding, staff time, networks, goals, and programs)
- Work with Community Colleges and other training organizations to create programs and pathways that meets employers' needs

Gathering and disseminating information

- Analyze internal customer satisfaction data to improve service delivery
- Collect information about employer and jobseeker needs and share with partners
- Disseminate labor market information through the partner and customer network
- Provide information to jobseekers about in-demand careers and job opportunities
- Provide information to employers about the talent pool, labor market, etc.
- Understand the talent needs in the region and the training that exists to meet these needs

Outreach and communication

- Promote West Michigan Works! and the services of the workforce development system
- Engage customers proactively
- Position the Board as the voice for workforce development strategy in the region

Career Coaching and Assessment

- Determine the service needs of jobseekers through assessments
- Assess jobseekers' interests, skills, and abilities to inform stronger career coaching
- Utilize diagnostic tool(s) to identify employers' needs

Placement and retention

- Connect qualified jobseekers to employer needs
- Follow up to ensure retention and fit
- Build continuing relationships, not transactions

Goals and Strategies

This strategic plan contains five goals with 18 accompanying strategies, which are designed to contribute to achieving more than one goal.



Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.



Increase the local talent pool.



Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.



Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.



Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Customer-Focused Strategies

- 1: Create a diagnostic tool for use with every employer contact to determine what their service needs may be.
- 2: Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.
- 3: Educate youth about the opportunities that are available in the local economy.
- 4: Increase outreach to youth, underemployed, and hard to serve populations.
- 5: Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.
- 6: Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and create a resource guide to promote services.

Capacity Building Strategies

- 13: Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.
- 14: Offer professional development opportunities for all staff.
- 15: Provide networking or exchange opportunities for staff from different Service Centers to learn best practices from across the region.

System Focused Strategies

- 7: Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.
- 8: Map career pathways within the region's key industries, including all levels of education and training and multiple entry and exit points.
- 9: Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board's network of partners.
- 10: Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.
- 11: Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board's role in filling those gaps can be.
- 12: Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.

Accountability Strategies

- 16: Engage board members in strategic plan implementation and progress tracking through subcommittees.
- 17: Create metrics and measurement tools to allow the Board to monitor the progress toward its goals.
- 18: Conduct annual reviews of regional service delivery models and execution to ensure consistency of high quality service at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers.

The goals and strategies are described in more detail below. The goals are identified first, including several metrics for monitoring their achievement and progress, as well as an identification of the strategies that contribute to each goal's success. Following the goals is a section describing each of the strategies, including the goals they will contribute to and which of West Michigan Works! core competencies will be used to implement the strategy.

GOALS

1 Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.

Metrics: per Qtr/Yr

- # of employers contacted in targeted sectors/total number of employers in sector
- # of new employer customers
- # of diagnostics completed
- # of repeat employer customers
- Employer satisfaction rating

Strategies

- **1:** Create a diagnostic tool for use with every employer contact to determine what their service needs may be.
- **2:** Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.
- **5:** Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.
- **12:** Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.

2 Increase the local talent pool.

Metrics: per Qtr/Yr

- # of Career Portfolios completed across industries
- # of employers engaged in/seeking softs skills program grads
- # of job seekers successfully completed soft skills program
- # of job seekers attending hiring events (job fairs, EOD, Meet the Employer, etc.)
- # of PMTC resumes
- # of Talent Tours conducted
- #of students informed about in demand occupations (i.e. MiCareer Quest, school partnership work, etc.)

Strategies

- **3:** Educate youth on the opportunities that are available in the local economy.
- **4:** Increase outreach to youth, underemployed, and hard to serve populations.
- **5:** Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.
- **7:** Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.
- **8:** Map career pathways within the region's key industries, including all levels of education and training and multiple entry and exit points.

- **9:** Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board’s network of partners.
- **10:** Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.
- **12:** Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.

3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers’ workforce needs.

Metrics: per Qtr/Yr

- # of community partner meetings across counties
- # of strategies implemented to address issues identified
- # of Industry Council and other community conversation meetings held
- # of *employers* in attendance at Industry Council and/or community conversation meetings
- % of Counties represented in each Industry Council
- # of employer seminars offered
- # of presentations given

Strategies:

- **2:** Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.
- **6:** Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and create a resource guide to promote services.
- **7:** Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.
- **9:** Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board’s network of partners.
- **10:** Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.
- **11:** Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board’s role in filling those gaps can be.
- **12:** Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.
- **13:** Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.

4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Metrics: per Qtr/Yr

- # of grants applications submitted/# of grants awarded (win rate)
- Total non-WIOA formula allocation dollars secured
- % of funding sources beyond WIOA formula funding
- # of partner grants awarded in support of strategic plan
- # of new projects developed by Industry Councils

Strategies:

- **2:** Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.
- **6:** Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and create a resource guide to promote services.
- **9:** Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board's network of partners.
- **10:** Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.
- **11:** Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board's role in filling those gaps can be.
- **13:** Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.
- **18:** Conduct annual reviews of regional service delivery models and execution to ensure consistency of high quality service at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers.

5

Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Metrics: per Qtr/Year

- # of staff professional development/continuing education hours logged
- # of trainings or workshops attended by board members
- # of certificate based training courses taken by staff

Strategies:

- **14:** Offer professional development opportunities for all staff.
- **15:** Provide networking or exchange opportunities for staff from different Service Centers to learn best practices from across the region.
- **16:** Engage board members in strategic plan implementation and progress tracking through subcommittees.
- **17:** Create metrics and measurement tools to allow the Board to monitor the progress toward its goals.
- **18:** Conduct annual reviews of regional service delivery models and execution to ensure consistency of high quality service at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers.

STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1. Create a diagnostic tool for use with every employer contact to determine what their service needs may be.

Surveys showed that employers who had accessed services from West Michigan Works! were satisfied with the quality of services they received. Often, however, employers do not know what services are available or may be so entrenched in the day-to-day business that they can't articulate areas where they may be in need. A diagnostic tool used during any employer interview can help employers to identify areas where they may need assistance, and highlight services, from Michigan Works! or other community partners, that may be able to meet those needs.

Goals Supported:

- 1 Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information; Career Coaching and Assessment

STRATEGY 2. Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.

West Michigan Works! is already convening industry councils in the region to help identify employer needs from the industry-wide perspective. These councils are a great opportunity to identify shared strategies and best practices, both among groups of employers as well as among groups of community partners to pool resources and meet common needs. Working with community partners in this way will help to diversify and leverage resources.

Goals Supported:

- 1 Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.
- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.
- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication; Career Coaching and Assessment; Placement and retention

STRATEGY 3. Educate youth about the opportunities that are available in the local economy.

In focus groups, both employers and community partners acknowledged that many youth in the region do not have a clear understanding of what the local economy looks like and what career opportunities exist for them after high school or postsecondary education. As the unemployment rate decreases and the available talent pool seems smaller and smaller, it is increasingly important to engage youth to build the future pipeline for the region's employers and keep young people in the region.

Goals Supported:

- 2 Increase the local talent pool.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication; Career Coaching and Assessment

STRATEGY 4. Increase outreach to youth, underemployed, and hard to serve populations.

One of the greatest challenges cited through surveys and input sessions was finding workers as the unemployment rate decreases and there are fewer qualified workers looking for employment. To increase the available talent pool, it will be important to start reaching out to new or harder to reach populations, including the underemployed and individuals with barriers to employment. Those who are underemployed may have an easier transition to some higher skilled positions, and if transitioned to jobs that meet their level of skill and education, will open up opportunities for those who may need entry level or lower-skilled work. Working with partners to address barriers to employment will allow access to a wider population who may not previously have been able to fully participate in the labor force.

Goals Supported:

- 2 Increase the local talent pool.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication

STRATEGY 5. Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.

The biggest skill gap identified by employers in West Michigan and across the country is soft skills, such as being at work on time, displaying appropriate work place behavior, and interacting respectfully with coworkers. Developing a training program to address these skillsets can help jobseekers to understand what will be expected of them in the workplace, and will help employers to feel confident that candidates have been exposed to these competencies prior to their employment.

Goals Supported:

- 1 Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.
- 2 Increase the local talent pool.

Core Competencies: Career Coaching and Assessment; Placement and retention

STRATEGY 6. Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and create a resource guide to promote services.

One of the first steps to being able to work collaboratively is to have a full picture of the organizations in West Michigan and the services they offer. Community partners in input sessions discussed the spirit of collaboration that exists in the region and that communications and referrals are easy between those partners who are known, however, much of this collaboration is relationship and word of mouth based. Cataloging this network as much as possible can help to expand these relationships to other organizations and other parts of the region, and provide an easy reference when a question arises about service availability.

Goals Supported:

- 3** Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.
- 4** Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication

STRATEGY 7. Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.

Some of the greatest barriers to employment mentioned in surveys and input sessions were infrastructure-related obstacles, such as housing, transportation, and internet access. While providing these services may not be directly within the core competencies of West Michigan Works!, gathering information from customers and hosting conversations about these needs with community partners is important to bringing awareness of these issues and how they affect the labor force.

Goals Supported:

- 2** Increase the local talent pool.
- 3** Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication

STRATEGY 8. Map career pathways within the region’s key industries, including all levels of education and training and multiple entry and exit points.

Clearly articulated career pathways are a key strategy to engaging and retaining the region’s workforce. Providing a picture of the education and training that is required for all levels of positions and the advancement that is possible from any starting points can help students and workers begin to think about a long-term career and how to develop that career without leaving the region. Developing these pathways across many community partners and education institutions with first-hand information from local employers will ensure that there is a consistent message communicated to the local workforce.

Goals Supported:

- 2 Increase the local talent pool.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information; Career Coaching and Assessment

STRATEGY 9. Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board’s network of partners.

One of the most often mentioned strengths of the workforce development system in surveys and input sessions was the network of relationships that exists among organizations in the region, especially within each individual county. The level of involvement of Michigan Works! as a partner seemed to vary by county before the merger of Boards occurred. It will be important to continue to forge these partnerships in each county to ensure that collaboration and implementation of the strategic plan can be successful across all counties of the region. The more partners that can be involved, the wider the Board’s reach.

Goals Supported:

- 2 Increase the local talent pool.
- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers’ workforce needs.
- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Outreach and communication

STRATEGY 10. Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services. Through surveys and input sessions, many of the successful initiatives discussed came about because of innovative solutions created through a collaboration of multiple partners. The more the Board can support innovative work outside of “business as usual,” the more they will be able to find new strategies that can improve the current service offerings.

Goals Supported:

- 2 Increase the local talent pool.
- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers’ workforce needs.
- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 11. Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board’s role in filling those gaps can be.

Through monitoring an “ecosystem map” and catalogue of the community partners in the West Michigan region, the Board can identify where gaps in services may exist. Though West Michigan Works! may not be able to fill all gaps through direct services, the Board has identified its core competencies and can examine the community needs and determine which competencies the Board may be able to use to try to meet those needs—whether it is through making connections among other agencies, working directly with jobseekers, convening area employers, or another competency.

Goals Supported:

- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers’ workforce needs.
- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 12. Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.

While West Michigan Works! is a trusted partner to many community organizations and employers, it is not a household name. The Board can reach more customers by creating an outreach strategy with activities that reach into each county to ensure that there is awareness of West Michigan Works! throughout the region and its services are easily available for those who have not accessed them before.

Goals Supported:

- 1 Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.
- 2 Increase the local talent pool.
- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication

STRATEGY 13. Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.

To ensure that the Board and staff can continue to pursue innovative practices and solutions that are outside of current program parameters, the Board should seek additional ways of generating resources, whether it is through leveraging the resources of partner organizations or pursuing grant opportunities. This will help West Michigan Works! to become less reliant on federal funding, which may become more scarce.

Goals Supported:

- 3 Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.
- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting

STRATEGY 14. Offer professional development opportunities for all staff.

Most staff indicated in surveys that they feel they have tools and resources they need to be effective in their roles with West Michigan Works! However, still many stressed the importance of continued professional development, especially as schedules are busy and staff feel that they do not have time to make their own opportunities or find new resources to learn more that can help them be more effective. Providing more opportunities for staff at all levels and centers will establish a culture of support and growth and help staff feel more confident in their knowledge and abilities.

Goals Supported:

- 5 Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 15. Provide networking or exchange opportunities for staff from different Service Centers to learn best practices from across the region.

In the survey completed by West Michigan Works! Management and Staff, some indicated they felt that though progress was being made to bring the region together after the merger, some staff still feel there is a disconnect among service centers across the region. Providing opportunities for staff to network and/or experience how other service centers are operating will both help to build a sense of a regional identity, as well as to share best practices among different centers.

Goals Supported:

- 5 Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 16. Engage board members in strategic plan implementation and progress tracking through subcommittees.

Board member engagement is key to ensuring that progress is made on the strategic plan, and that it is visible to the many organizations that Board members represent and are connected to in the community. In the implementation section of the plan, there is a recommendation for subcommittees that can be implemented to monitor each of the Board's goals and core competencies and host discussions about actions that will support progress toward these outlined goals and strategies.

Goals Supported:

- 5 Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Core Competencies: Convening and connecting; Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 17. Create metrics and measurement tools to allow the Board to monitor the progress toward its goals.

The Board does not intend to create this strategic plan to sit on a shelf. By including metrics and tools for measuring progress, the Board can continuously assess the success of the plan and adjust approaches accordingly. The Board should revisit the strategies included in this plan annually to determine if they are helping to improve the metrics laid out in support of the goals or if any changes need to be made.

Goals Supported:

- 5 Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information

STRATEGY 18. Conduct annual reviews of regional service delivery models and execution to ensure consistency of high quality service at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers.

An important role of the Board is to ensure that high quality services are being delivered consistently in all areas across the region. Currently, there is not one consistent model of service delivery at every service center in the region. The Board should review its service delivery models on an annual basis to evaluate quality of services and demand across the region. Upon review, the Board can also share best practices across the region and help to identify any innovative solutions to increase effectiveness and consistency. This consistency will benefit customers who interact with the system in different areas of the region, as well as staff who are looking to feel that they are a part of a larger region, with a wider focus than just one service center.

Goals Supported:

- 4 Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.
- 5 Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Core Competencies: Gathering and disseminating information; Outreach and communication

WEST MICHIGAN WORKS! WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission | To lead workforce development strategy and resource alignment in West Michigan by understanding the talent needs of employers and employment needs of jobseekers and connecting them to solutions.

Vision | West Michigan Works! is an employer-recognized model of high quality service that convenes an aligned network of partners, cultivates a skilled workforce, and meets the needs of employers.

Values | Integrity, Diversity and Inclusion, Collaboration, Exceptional Customer Service, Commitment to Community, Data-driven Action, Continuous Improvement

GOAL 1

Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.

GOAL 2

Increase the local talent pool.

GOAL 3

Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.

GOAL 4

Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.

GOAL 5

Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.

Customer-Focused Strategies

- 1: Create a diagnostic tool for use with every employer contact to determine what their service needs may be.
- 2: Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.
- 3: Educate youth about the opportunities that are available in the local economy.
- 4: Increase outreach to youth, underemployed, and hard to serve populations.
- 5: Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.
- 6: Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and create a resource guide to promote services.

Capacity Building Strategies

- 13: Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.
- 14: Offer professional development opportunities for all staff.
- 15: Provide networking or exchange opportunities for staff from different Service Centers to learn best practices from across the region.

*●●●●● Denotes corresponding goals.

System Focused Strategies

- 7: Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.
- 8: Map career pathways within the region's key industries, including all levels of education and training and multiple entry and exit points.
- 9: Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board's network of partners.
- 10: Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.
- 11: Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board's role in filling those gaps can be.
- 12: Create an outreach strategy to increase the recognition of the West Michigan Works! brand.

Accountability Strategies

- 16: Engage board members in strategic plan implementation and progress tracking through subcommittees.
- 17: Create metrics and measurement tools to allow the Board to monitor the progress toward its goals.
- 18: Conduct annual reviews of regional service delivery models and execution to ensure consistency of high quality service at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers.

Implementing the Plan

A strong implementation framework and plan is key to ensuring that the strategic plan does not just sit on a shelf, but is an evolving guidepost for the work of the Board, with both goals to strive for and a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of the Board and West Michigan Works!

The first step of implementation is identifying current activities that contribute to the plan and prioritizing the next steps for action. Some level of work toward some or all of the identified strategies may already be happening, and identifying these activities will help to determine a place to start and where coordination can or should take place.

Prioritization will be important. While there are 18 strategies identified above, not all will need to be acted upon right away. Honing in on a few strategies at one time until they are completed or consistently maintain progress, build momentum, and allow for a greater focus to the Board's strategic work.

Annual action plans are a great tool for clearly defining and focusing the Board's work once strategies have been prioritized. These plans go into greater detail on individual tasks to be completed, including timeline, milestones, responsible parties, resources needed, and any anticipated obstacles. Examples of action planning templates are included in Appendix C.

Utilizing subcommittees of the Board to focus on various aspects of the strategic plan is a great way to ensure a focus is kept on implementation. While much of the legwork of the implementation activities will involve staff action, board members can provide leadership, make decisions based on data and progress, and engage their networks when beneficial.

Subcommittees should also include membership from non-board members. This is a great way to include influential community members or subject matter experts that can provide extra insights for a particular topic. This is also a great way to reengage many of the community members who provided input to the process through surveys and input sessions. This involvement can keep them bought in to the process, seeing that action is being taken based on their input.

It will also be important to revisit the contents of the strategic plan, at least annually. Goals typically last for the entirety of a strategic plan period, but strategies may change as the environment changes and progress is made. In addition to continuously tracking progress and providing updates at board meetings, the Board should review the strategies included in the plan to ensure they are still relevant. If some are completed, or become irrelevant as time goes by, they can be replaced with others that will help to work toward the goals.

Subcommittees

Five board subcommittees have been recommended to align with the goals outlined in this plan as well as West Michigan Works! core competencies.

Outreach and Communications

Key core competencies covered: gathering and disseminating information to the community, outreach and communication.

The outreach and communications subcommittee will play a key role in the West Michigan Works! branding strategy and increasing awareness of services and initiatives of the system. It should be closely tied to the other committees as it will be involved in communicating all of the initiatives that West Michigan Works! undertakes through the strategic plan and otherwise.

Employer Solutions

Key core competencies covered: gathering and disseminating information among employers, assessment, placement and retention.

The employer solutions subcommittee will work on strategies related to strengthening the Board's relationships with local employers. This committee will focus strongly on the services that are currently available for individual employers and how West Michigan Works! can expand the reach and continue to build the quality of those services that are offered.

Talent Solutions

Key core competencies covered: gathering and disseminating information among jobseekers, career coaching, placement and retention.

The talent solutions subcommittee will focus on the services provided to individuals; monitoring the quality of those services and seeking solutions for improvement. The committee will focus on strategies to expand the talent pool in West Michigan, including targeting youth, underemployed workers, and individuals with barriers to employment.

Strategic Partnerships

Key core competencies covered: convening and connecting, gathering and disseminating information throughout partner network.

The strategic partnerships committee will focus on convening partners and employer customers to gain a better picture of the local workforce development system and workforce needs. This includes the facilitation of regional industry councils. The committee will keep track of an ecosystem map to identify any gaps in the system and seek new connections to fill them. It will also drive system-wide initiatives, like career pathways, promoting innovative solutions and diversifying revenue.

Executive Committee – Strategic plan implementation monitoring

In addition to its continued role of financial and administrative oversight, the Executive Committee will monitor strategic plan implementation, including progress tracking and annually reviewing the strategies and metrics for relevance. It will also have a focus on staff-centered strategies, including professional development and internal career pathway opportunities