



STRATEGIC PLAN *Report*

Update, 2020

Acknowledgements

The West Michigan Works! Strategic Plan was developed in 2016, shortly after the organization was created through a merger of multiple Michigan Works! agencies to serve a seven-county region. The comprehensive process that resulted in the plan engaged numerous stakeholders, including board members and staff, community partners, education and training providers, economic development, employers, and job seekers. Their input was incredibly valuable and ensured a strong plan that launched the newly formed entity, providing strategic direction and focus.

After nearly four years, it was time to update the plan, based on new conditions and needs among partners and local communities. The update process also engaged numerous stakeholders, through focus groups and surveys. This updated plan reflects the next phase of the organization's forward momentum, building on the progress made to date, and leveraging strengths and opportunities. The participation of everyone involved is greatly appreciated.

Participating Entities

West Michigan Works! Workforce Development Board	Buist Electric JBS Walker Tool & Die	Action Mold Mel Trotter Ministries Steepletown
West Michigan Works! staff	Thompson M-TEC	Kent ISD
Greater Ottawa County United Way	Mary Free Bed	Ottawa Food
Allegan Adult Education	The Employers Association	Heart of West Michigan United Way
Community Action of Allegan County	Digital Tool & Die, Inc Hispanic Center	Portland Adult Education
ITC Holdings	Windemuellier Electric	Montcalm Community College
Project Hope	Northview Public Schools	Belding Adult Education
Barry ISD	Advanced Interiors	Ionia-Montcalm DHHS
Barry County EDA	Michigan Rehabilitation Services	Offender Success
Flexfab	Ottawa Area ISD	MSU Extension
Grand Rapids Urban League	Wolverine Coil Spring	Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce
Metron Integrated Health	Kent Friend of the Court	Ionia County Literacy Council
West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	Meijer	Heartlands Career Center
Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity	Grand Rapids chair Co. Blackmer	Montcalm Area Reading Council

The Right Place

United Way of Montcalm-
Ionia Counties

Muskegon Area ISD

Hines Corp

Sintel, Inc

Read Muskegon

UA Local 174

Medallion Instrumentation
Systems

West Michigan Molding

Muskegon DHHS

Zeeland Adult Education

Great Lakes Superior Lakes

Telamon Corporation

Fogg Filler

Star Crane & Hoist

West Coast Chamber

Lakeshore Advantage

Koeze

Associated Builders and
Contractors, West Michigan
Chapter

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Introduction

West Michigan Works! is part of the statewide Michigan Works! system and is the official workforce development agency in West Michigan, serving the employers and job seekers of Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. The agency brings federal and state workforce programs to the region, leveraging and aligning resources for maximum impact, with the ultimate goal of preparing a skilled workforce that meets the needs of local businesses.

The agency was formed through a consolidation of three Michigan Works! Agencies and the addition of two counties from a fourth. This regional approach allowed a decrease in administrative overhead and eliminated duplication of services. It allowed the agency to streamline processes and provide consistent, high-quality services for the region's customers.

The reorganization also provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at the regional workforce development landscape and create a unified strategy for moving forward. In 2016, a comprehensive strategic planning process was conducted, establishing a clear vision, mission, and strategy for West Michigan Works! The resulting strategic plan prioritized creating and strengthening relationships, determining employer needs, and increasing outreach.

With this guidance, agency leadership worked diligently to implement the plan. Their persistence and hard work paid off – all tactical items from the plan have been completed, and much progress has been made in strategic focus areas. With this forward momentum and an ever-changing economy, an update to the plan was warranted.

The agency's contracted One-Stop Operator facilitated the update process, evaluating current conditions, collecting and aggregating input, and identifying new strategic directions. The updated plan builds on the success of the previous four years, leveraging the foundations laid by the board and staff. The Vision, Mission, Values, and Core Competencies are unchanged; however, the Goals and Strategies are more targeted than before, reflecting the specific needs expressed by stakeholders during the input process.

Process

Similar to the process that created the Strategic Plan, this update process involved several steps that identified the needs of local communities, as well as the best way for West Michigan Works! to meet those needs. Each step in the process is described below.

Current state analysis

The One-Stop Operator conducted an inventory of the major projects and activities that the agency has accomplished in its implementation of the strategic plan. Staff provided information and the One-Stop Operator, in a neutral capacity, evaluated and analyzed progress to date. This analysis reviewed the information in light of the five goals and 18 strategies from the original plan. A report of this information is included here as [Appendix A](#) (Goals) and [Appendix B](#) (Strategies).

Review of employer surveys

The Business Solutions Unit conducts surveys annually of both existing and potential employer customers. Survey results from the last two years were reviewed to provide an employer perspective in the process. Employers were also included in the Focus Groups, below.

Focus Groups – employers, partners, and board members

Focus groups were conducted in all counties throughout the region, providing ample opportunity for stakeholders to engage in the process. The structure of these sessions consisted of examining community needs and challenges as well as brainstorming potential solutions. A total of 80 individuals representing employers, partners, and board members participated in the sessions.

Staff survey

Following the Focus Groups, a survey was distributed to staff. The goal of the survey was to gather input from the frontline regarding community needs and potential solutions, as well as organizational needs.

Board member survey

A survey was sent to the Workforce Development Board to provide further opportunity for engagement, in addition to the Focus Group sessions. The survey asked board members to rank current goals in order of their importance, provide feedback on the potential solutions that were identified in the Focus Groups and staff survey, and offer additional strategies.

Workforce Development Board Executive Committee review

The Executive Committee of the Workforce Development Board reviewed common themes that had emerged from the process thus far at its November 2019 meeting. They asked questions and provided input. They also reviewed a draft of the updated Goals and Strategies at their January 2020 meeting, again asking relevant questions, providing feedback, and recommending appropriate revisions.

Job seeker survey

A survey was also sent to job seekers in order to determine their needs and which of the potential solutions would be most beneficial. An incentive was offered to increase participation; however, less than 100 job seekers participated.

Key Findings

The comprehensive process for evaluating activities to date and gathering stakeholder input allowed the One-Stop Operator to identify common themes. These helped in determining which aspects of the plan should be revised and which should stay the same. The key findings also laid the foundation for the specific changes to Goals and Strategies.

Mission, Vision, Values, and Core Competencies

It was determined early in the process that these elements of the plan should not change. They are intended to serve as long-term directives for the agency, and are not subject to fluctuations in the economy, funding, partnerships, or other environmental factors.

Common Themes

The themes that recurred throughout numerous conversations indicate priorities for an updated Strategic Plan. These are within the context of the needs of West Michigan communities, employers, job seekers, and partners.

Common Theme	Description
Employer Supports	Helping employers to be successful by connecting them to resources for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hiring – connecting to partners for hidden pools of talent• Training – improving their current workforce• Retaining – keeping workers once they are hired and providing pathways
Barriers	Engaging with partners to increase access to services for barrier removal for both employers and job seekers; Increasing awareness among legislators and other members of the public about the issues that prevent employment success
Pipeline	Career awareness, early engagement, long-term career planning and pathways
Connections	Communication across partners regarding local job opportunities, career pathways, and workforce development resources; connecting employers to education
Employability skills	Sometimes referred to as “soft” skills: workplace literacy, communication, attitude, attendance, etc.

Some of the common themes that were identified in the previous strategic planning process proved to be still relevant, but in a more integrated manner. For instance, Strategic Partnerships were identified as a priority and formed the basis of several previous goals and strategies. It is clear that the agency made this a focus area: partnerships have received significant attention and have been developed across the region within the last four years. Now, the need lies more in defining roles and proving value as a resource in all partnerships.

It is also important to note that the needs across the region require integrated approaches, including partnerships, employer perspective, and talent development. Therefore, any updated strategy will require multi-faceted, team-based implementation in order to be successful.

In addition, the update process revealed a need to improve the culture within the organization, although employee engagement appears to be positive. Specific ideas for improvement include enhanced professional development and training for frontline staff, as well as an increased focus on diversity and inclusion.

A new concern was expressed in various settings regarding the importance of diversity and inclusion, both for the organization's culture as well as services to customers. This includes increasing awareness of the benefits of a diverse workforce, as well as solutions that engage the current workforce in an inclusive manner. This concern aligns well with the needs of employers to broaden their perspective, reaching pools of talent that might have been overlooked and underappreciated in the past.

Overall, the key finding that emerged from the entire process is that West Michigan Works! has successfully implemented the goals from its initial Strategic Plan, where the focus was creating, establishing, and developing new approaches. For the foreseeable future, the agency should focus on leveraging what they have built in order to find targeted solutions that are beneficial for job seekers, employers, partners, and communities.

Organizational Purpose

An organization's purpose is not a single expression of its vision or mission. It is a collective representation of these and more; it is the reason the organization exists, as well as the drive to move it forward. As such, the Vision, Mission, Values, and Core Competencies are presented here in their original form; the process for updating this plan revealed no need to change them. They were created in order to serve as a long-lasting compass, providing direction and guidance at a strategic level.

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.

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.

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.

Core Competencies

Although the Core Competencies have not changed, their descriptions have been updated here to reflect progress thus far as well as opportunities for further leveraging these strengths.

Convening and Connecting

Staff members across the organization have built partnerships and established relationships with partners in the workforce development ecosystem.

West Michigan Works! can build on this competency with the following tactics:

- Act as a hub for connecting organizations across regional networks
- Continuously identify gaps and target resources accordingly
- Continue convening industry councils focused on the talent needs of employers
- Work with Community Colleges and other training organizations to create programs and pathways that meets employers' needs for their current and future workforce

Gathering and disseminating information

During the course of its ongoing work, the organization collects information on employer needs, skills of the labor pool, barriers to employment, training programs, and much more. The organization is positioned to share this information with partners and communities in order to enhance understanding of workforce challenges as well as opportunities.

West Michigan Works! can build on this competency with the following tactics:

- Educate the public, partners, and decision-makers on the impacts of policy, regulations, and structural barriers to successful employment
- Map career pathways and share with partners
- Disseminate labor market information through partner and customer networks
- Provide information to jobseekers about in-demand careers and job opportunities
- Provide information to employers about the talent pool and local labor market
- Understand the talent needs in the region and the training that exists to meet these needs

Outreach and Communication

Outreach occurs at all levels throughout the organization and region, as well as through innovative marketing and public relations. The past four years have produced great success in terms of a positive brand that is recognized and respected.

West Michigan Works! can build on this competency with the following tactics:

- Continue to encourage outreach and partnership development by staff
- Build the brand so that customers see beyond core services
- Position the Board as the voice for workforce development strategy in the region

Career Coaching and Assessment

A Career Coaching model has been implemented for all programs, ensuring a holistic approach that emphasizes comprehensive assessment and preparation. This includes thorough exploration of in-demand occupations. The model improves training outcomes, matching to job opportunities, employer satisfaction, and long-term retention.

West Michigan Works! can build on this competency with the following tactics:

- Promote the use of the Career Coaching model to partners and employers
- Continue fine-tuning the model to ensure continuous improvement

Employment and retention

West Michigan Works! creates solutions that match the skills of job seekers with employer needs, bringing to bear the full scope of the workforce development system, all for the mutual benefit of both parties. This is done with the goal of long-term retention, rather than a quick-fix placement approach.

West Michigan Works! can build on this competency with the following tactics:

- Expand Retention Solutions services
- Ensure effective communication between Business Solutions, Talent Solutions, and Retention Solutions
- Increase access to resources that overcome barriers to obtaining and retaining employment
- Build continuing relationships, not transactions

West Michigan Workforce Development Ecosystem

The full picture of workforce development in West Michigan is much bigger than one agency. It operates as a system, incorporating a broad set of partners and stakeholders, all with a role to play in serving employers and job seekers needs.



During the initial strategic planning process, the Board discussed at length how best West Michigan Works! fits into this ecosystem. The process for updating the plan recognized this perspective, and purposefully chose to engage representatives from all stakeholders. This diverse input allowed for a more accurate analysis of progress made by the agency, as well as determining how best to continue effective collaboration within a broader system.

Goals and Strategies

The goals and strategies have been updated to reflect a “next-phase” focus for the agency. For a list of previous goals and strategies as well as an assessment of their progress, see [Appendix A](#) (Goals) and [Appendix B](#) (Strategies).

Goal A: Foster widespread networks to collaboratively address workforce needs in the region.

Goal B: Expand the local pipeline of work-ready talent to meet the needs of the workforce and of West Michigan employers.

Goal C: Enhance capacity and increase resources by leveraging strengths, successes, and networks.

Goal D: Improve engagement across the organization through strategic initiatives, professional development, and a solutions-driven culture.

Goal E: Enable a culture that honors the worth and dignity of all people, where staff and customers have equitable access to opportunities.

Customer-Focused Strategies

1. Engage opportunity youth with experiences that build occupational awareness and prepare them for career pathways within the local economy. (A, B, D, E)
2. Connect with overlooked talent pools through partnership networks and strategic outreach efforts. (A, B, E)
3. Expand employability skills training services to new, targeted audiences across the region. (B, C, E)
4. Establish and expand services that provide solutions for retention of employees at West Michigan employers. (A, C, E)

System-Focused Strategies

5. Advocate for systems and resources that lessen barriers to success for employers and underserved communities in West Michigan. (A, B, E)
6. Maintain career pathways mapping for the region’s key industries and serve as the primary resource for pathways information across the region. (A, C)
7. Enhance the positive reputation of West Michigan Works! through brand association with workforce resources and opportunities. (A, C, E)

Capacity-Building Strategies

8. Develop mechanisms that enable the organization to capitalize on successful initiatives and pursue different sources of funding. (C, D)
9. Develop robust systems for professional development in support of a culture that emphasizes staff diversity and inclusion, training, and empowerment. (D, E)
10. Improve communication among staff departments in support of a culture that prioritizes team-based approaches and solutions-driven strategies. (D, E)

Accountability Strategies

11. Engage board members in ongoing continuous improvement through subcommittees and workgroups that reinforce strategic priorities. *(A, D, E)*
12. Conduct annual reviews of service delivery models and execution to ensure equity, consistency, and quality at all West Michigan Works! Service Centers. *(A, D, E)*

Appendix A: Accomplishments by Goal

Goals from the previous plan are listed below, along with a summary of accomplishments to date in pursuit of that goal. Considerations lay the foundation for the recommended changes, as shown in the Goals and Strategies section of this report.

Goal (2016 Plan)	Accomplishments	Considerations
<p><i>Goal 1: Cultivate relationships with employers to understand and address the workforce demand in the region.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Business Solutions Representatives actively work with thousands of employers per year</i> • <i>MiCareerQuest involved dozens of companies</i> • <i>Five active Industry Councils convene regularly: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, Construction, and Food Processing</i> • <i>The Medical Assistant Registered Apprenticeship Program (MARAP) was launched</i> • <i>The America's Promise Grant apprenticeship program was launched</i> • <i>During Manufacturing Week, students visit dozens of companies per year</i> • <i>Talent Tours involve numerous employers all year</i> • <i>Retention Solutions programming was launched</i> 	<p>This goal has been a primary focus and it shows: the organization has its finger on the pulse of the business community, and thus is well-informed about employer needs. These relationships will continue to provide insight and local intelligence regarding workforce demand.</p>
<p><i>Goal 2: Increase the local talent pool.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>MiCareerQuest involved thousands of students</i> • <i>Expansion of Jobs for Michigan's Graduates across the region</i> • <i>WorkReady employability skills training was developed and is offered across the region</i> • <i>Collaboration with numerous Adult Education programs</i> • <i>Regular hiring events in all counties</i> • <i>Increased funding for in-demand trainings</i> • <i>Redesign of the PATH program to focus more on training and preparation, not just job search</i> 	<p>This also has been a significant focus, and has resulted in structures that provide occupational awareness, exposure to careers, and supports for improving the skills of the talent pool. This work has laid the foundation for serving as a primary resource regarding career opportunities in the region.</p>

Goal (2016 Plan)	Accomplishments	Considerations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Career Coaching and Career Portfolio model was implemented</i> 	
<p><i>Goal 3: Establish a network for community conversations on issues related to employers' workforce needs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The Career & Education Advisory Council was created</i> ● <i>Work closely with Talent 2025</i> ● <i>Talent Solutions Managers sit on numerous community networks and collaboratives</i> ● <i>Industry councils, the Workforce Development Board, and board committees provide a forum for employer conversations</i> 	<p>Other than the industry councils, there is no formal network as described in the goal. However, this is likely unnecessary given the broad reach of numerous networks that the organization either leads, supports, or participates in.</p>
<p><i>Goal 4: Diversify resources and strategies through innovative partnerships and solutions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Apprenticeship USA</i> ● <i>MAICA 2.0</i> ● <i>MICA 2.0</i> ● <i>Kellogg, DeVos</i> ● <i>America's Promise Grant</i> 	<p>Some progress has been made on this goal, with new funding coming from state and federal sources. To improve on this work, the organization should utilize the strengths built over the last few years to ramp up efforts to cultivate alternative revenue streams.</p>
<p><i>Goal 5: Increase Board and staff engagement through strategic initiatives and professional development.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NEP ● OCL ● National Skills Coalition ● National Association of Workforce Boards Conference ● Michigan Works! Association Conference ● Career Pathway Leadership Certification ● LEDA Conference ● Career Coach Model / Training ● Human-Centered Design ● LEAN Training 	<p>Progress has been made on this goal, and its relevance has not changed. However, it should be focused on the full organization's engagement. Strategies should relate to organizational culture, staff training, and a new committee structure for the board.</p>

Appendix B: Status and Considerations by Strategy

Strategies from the 2016 Strategic Plan are listed here along with an indicator of their current status. Considerations lay the foundation for the recommended updates in the Goals and Strategies section of this report.

Strategy (2016 Plan)	Status	Considerations
Customer-Focused Strategies		
1. Create a diagnostic tool for use with every employer contact to determine what their service needs may be.	Complete	
2. Convene and facilitate Industry Councils in key West Michigan sectors.	Complete	Five councils established and ongoing
3. Educate youth about the opportunities that are available in the local economy.	Significant Progress	Career awareness events and activities are well-established
4. Increase outreach to youth, underemployed, and hard to serve populations.	Significant Progress	Partnership networks offer a venue to these populations
5. Develop and pilot a soft skills training program.	Complete	WorkReady is offered in all centers
6. Catalogue the services and strengths of partner organizations to have a full picture of the capabilities of the workforce development system and a resource guide to promote services.	Incomplete	Catalogue is not feasible due to dynamic nature of partnerships
System-Focused Strategies		
7. Identify and advocate for infrastructure improvements that could lessen barriers to employment for West Michigan workers.	Partial Progress	Leadership activity at state and federal levels
8. Map career pathways within the region's key industries, including all levels of education and training and multiple entry and exit points.	Almost Complete	Pathways will be ready for release in 2020
9. Create relationships with community-based organizations in each county to widen the Board's network of partners.	Complete	Management is empowered to cultivate relationships and establish partnerships

Strategy (2016 Plan)	Status	Considerations
10. Support innovative initiatives to promote continuous improvement of services.	Significant Progress	This is institutionalized across the system
11. Identify gaps in the workforce development ecosystem and determine what the Board's role in filling those gaps can be.	Complete	Strategic Partnerships assessment; again institutionalized
12. Create an outreach strategy to increase recognition of the West Michigan Works! Brand.	Ongoing	Successfully implemented and brand recognition is now significantly increased
Capacity-Building Strategies		
13. Seek and pursue alternate sources of funding.	Partial Progress	Some non-governmental funding has been obtained; Still primarily reliant on state and federal funding
14. Offer professional development opportunities for all staff.	Partial Progress	Solid onboarding process
15. Provide networking or exchange opportunities for staff from different Service Centers to learn best practices from across the region.	Incomplete	Structure is unnecessary and could be inefficient; the main issue is related to effective communication
Accountability Strategies		
16. Engage board members in strategic plan implementation and progress tracking through subcommittees.	Complete	Subcommittees are functional and engage in effective board-level discussion; however, new committees may be necessary to focus on this updated strategic plan
17. Create metrics and measurement tools to allow the Board to monitor the progress toward its goals.	Complete	Dashboards and performance data are shared and reviewed regularly
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.	Complete	