

A Framework For Talent In Northwest Michigan

FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE
A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN FOR NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

2014 REPORT

A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan was prepared as part of the *Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*, a regional resource for local governments, community organizations working to meet local goals. The *Framework* was developed as part of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative, as initiated by Governor Rick Snyder and signed into law as a part of the FY 2014 budget. The Regional Prosperity Initiative encourages local private, public, and non-profit partners to identify regionally aligned growth and investment strategies for the State of Michigan to support, not the other way around. It also provides the framework for streamlining state services and highlighting the regionally defined goals and strategies that will further Northwest Michigan's success.

The *Framework for Our Future* includes information and tools that can help stakeholders address issues such as housing, transportation, land use, energy, arts and culture, workforce and economic development, community health, food and farming systems, and natural resources. Data and information will help communities supplement their local deliberation, planning, and decision-making processes, and will help to identify the steps a community can take to address a local issue, if desired.

The *Framework for Our Future* was developed by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG) with input and partnerships from a variety of community stakeholders and members of the public. An intensive community outreach process featured a wide variety of opportunities for participation from the public: events, surveys, focus groups, online forums, and public discussions were held region-wide throughout the process. Outreach activities and engagement opportunities included a series of community dialogues, interviews, and other events designed to obtain input from individuals with disabilities, minorities, youth, those in poverty, and others that have historically been underrepresented in planning processes. Public input was used to identify priority community issues and concerns, and to help develop goals, strategies, and actions.

The goals, strategies, and actions included in the *Framework* were built upon public input heard throughout the process, as well as on existing and adopted goals from local plans and planning initiatives. Strategies are not intended as recommendations, nor do they supersede and local government decision-making. Moreover, the *Framework* is not intended for, nor shall it be used for, infringing upon or the taking of personal property rights enjoyed by the residents of Northwest Michigan. Rather, the information included in the *Framework* is instead intended to serve as a compilation of best practices to help guide local decision-makers who would like to address the issues identified in the *Framework*.

FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE

A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN FOR NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

Let Our Resources Work For You.

Northwest Michigan Council of Governments

Workforce • Business • Community

In This Report

INTRODUCTION 3
- Enhancing Economic Prosperity 4

SKILLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKFORCE 5
- Soft Skills in Demand 5
- Opportunities 7

SUPPLY & DEMAND 8
- Just-In-Time Training 9
- Opportunities 10
- Spreading the Word: Student Video Contest 10

WORKING PAST BARRIERS 11
- Wage Survey 13
- Opportunities 15
- GOOD Training Program 15

TALENT RETENTION & ATTRACTION 16
- Live Work Play 18
- Opportunities 18

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST 19

FRAMEWORK STRATEGIES 20
- Just-In-Time Training 9
- Opportunities 10
- Spreading the Word: Student Video Contest 10

A Framework for Talent: Introduction

One of the most important contributors to a region's quality of life is employment. It is an underlying goal of myriad plans, economic development strategies, and community initiatives, precisely because of its enormous importance to individual families and households as well as the community overall. Without gainful, sustainable employment, a family experiences financial and domestic hardship. Likewise, without a strong employment base, a community struggles to support business and meet basic needs of residents and the community while contending with social impacts of unemployment. During the recent recession, many communities in the ten-county region of Northwest Michigan experienced the distress of mass layoffs and business closure, and many families felt the sting of job loss, along with the emotional, financial, and social turbulence that accompany it.

In 2014, Michigan's economy is recovering: unemployment rates are dropping, jobs are being created, and businesses are looking for new employees. However, communities are facing changing economic realities that require new skills and community assets in order to compete globally. In today's economy, the presence of a skilled workforce is one of the biggest drivers of economic growth. When a talented, skilled, and productive workforce is present in a community, businesses can grow and expand, ultimately creating the jobs that residents need to thrive.

Northwest Michigan has a talented and diverse workforce that generates billions of dollars in economic activity annually. Yet, many of these workers lack the occupational, technical, or other skills needed for today's new jobs. Despite a high volume of available jobs, a lack of qualified workers means that many positions remain unfilled. And while unemployment rates are dropping, many residents region-wide continue to seek work for which they have the right skills and qualifications.



Communities are facing changing economic realities that require new skills and community assets in order to compete globally.

A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan explores the many factors involved in developing and attracting the talent needed to support the region's economy, while also meeting the employment needs of residents. Understanding these factors is critical to developing successful strategies for helping unemployed workers obtain available jobs, ensuring that young people are adequately prepared for future jobs, and leveraging the collective assets of the region to build a successful working community.

While Northwest Michigan, with its many place-based assets, stands at a distinct advantage in terms of being able to offer a high quality of place that's attractive for new residents and workers, it also encounters challenges to attracting new talent including wages, cultural issues related to diversity, and entrepreneurial activity. Meanwhile, gaps in employability skills, job skills, and academic readiness among parts of the region's workforce leave many employers unable to fill positions from the region's existing workforce:

- Low wages for available jobs, combined with high costs for basic living expenses, leave many workers struggling to make ends meet, while challenges in meeting transportation and childcare needs act as barriers to many that are seeking employment.

- The region is experiencing a "skills gaps" between in-demand jobs and the skills available in the current workforce. Building the skills needed among the current workforce requires targeted training programs that also address employability skills, academic readiness, and basic skills like digital literacy. However, participation in these programs is limited, due to a variety of factors, including a cost; a lack of awareness of in-demand occupations and

the skills that they require; and difficulties in timing trainings to concur with immediate and pressing workforce demands.

- Population trends in Northwest Michigan reflect a "brain drain," as the region loses young individuals and families while older, highly skilled workers enter retirement.

- As the state transitions to the new economy, community- and place-based assets like high-tech infrastructure, supportive business policy and regulations, and unique, vibrant communities are needed to attract a diverse, skilled workforce that drives new investment and jobs with living wages. Yet some local policies can act as barriers to new economic activity and investment that results in desirable communities that create jobs and attract talented workers.

Communities have an important role to play in building the skills and attracting the workforce needed for the region's economic prosperity. *A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan* identifies many of the factors at play in the region's workforce, and provides an overview of how communities can engage to address workforce issues. For instance, local and regional agencies can collaborate with business and educational partners to provide training for in-demand occupations while building employability skills. Communities can help to address barriers to employment by coordinating transit or other transportation improvements, and by encouraging new housing choices in and near employment centers, while placemaking initiatives that build on local and regional assets can develop the vibrant places that attract new residents, workers, and entrepreneurs that ultimately create new jobs. Communities can also help to foster new business with community initiatives like small business incubators, revolving loan funds, and regulatory support that enables businesses to grow and expand.

Enhancing Economy Prosperity

Talent makes up the underpinnings of the regional economy:

- Businesses can grow and expand when there is a reliable workforce with the right skills
- Workers that are trained for the right skills can obtain jobs with living wages that provide financial and social stability for residents
- When workers are employed, they spend money and support local businesses

By The Numbers

154,505
PEOPLE IN THE LABOR FORCE

7.9%
REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AS OF JUNE 2014

2,047
JOB POSTINGS ON **PURE MICHIGAN TALENT CONNECT** DURING JULY 2014

5.2%
PROJECTED GROWTH FOR ALL OCCUPATIONS BY 2020

$45.5K
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME



MUNSON HEALTHCARE
LARGEST EMPLOYER

Skills for a Successful Workforce

Occupational, technical, and "soft" skills are all fundamental for the workforce: in order for workers to move into jobs that are accessible, fulfilling, and pay a wage that provides for a family, they must possess the right combination of necessary skills. However employers participating in forums and responding to surveys by workforce entities and educational institutions, report that many in Northwest Michigan's workforce lack the skills needed to obtain good jobs, including occupational skills, employability skills like work ethic; technical skills like the ability to use a computer; communication skills; and basic academic skills like math and reading.

As workers struggle to find jobs for which they're qualified, employers throughout the region face challenges in finding qualified candidates to fill their open positions. In some cases, they receive applications from job seekers who do not have the skills necessary for the job; in other cases, they receive no applications at all. This dynamic reflects a "skills gap," which refers to the discrepancy between the specific skills that employers need and the skills that are currently held by the workforce. The severity of a skills gap can vary based on industry or occupation, by region, and by employer expectations.

Employability Skills

Employability skills are those that are applicable to every job, in every community. They include such skills as teamwork, reliability, respect, adaptability, and staying focused on the job, among many others. They are sometimes referred to as "soft skills," but should not be seen as insignificant. These abilities are often first on the list when employers are asked what they look for in hiring new employees. They are also the most common reason for termination (see Soft Skills in Demand sidebar).

Digital Literacy

In today's economy, almost every job requires use of technology, even prior to beginning employment: more and more employers are using online application services. Anyone with low levels of computer literacy is thus at an instant disadvantage when it comes to applying for and performing on a job. An individual's technology literacy is dependent upon his or her access to equipment—whether a personal computer, smart phone, or other devices. Regular use of technology is necessary in order to learn its various applications, and to prepare a job seeker for using it on the job. When access to technology is limited due to poverty, a "digital divide" occurs: those living in poverty are less likely to succeed in today's job market, due in part to limited technological skills and abilities. School systems across the region are attempting to bridge this divide by integrating computers into the classroom and providing iPads or laptops to students. However, school systems in affluent communities are better positioned to provide this additional equipment to their students than those in poverty-prone areas.

Another factor influencing digital literacy is the availability of broadband infrastructure. High speed internet is essential to using technology and learning its applications in the workplace. This infrastructure is available in most areas of the region, but is most common in densely

Soft Skills in Demand

In 2005, the Traverse Bay Poverty Reduction Initiative, in cooperation with the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce, conducted a survey of local employers on the top skills, attributes, and habits for job success. Also identified were the top reasons for termination. Of the 10 most common reasons for employee termination, the first eight can be categorized as "employability skills." The only job-specific reason is ranked #9 out of 10. See more at www.TraversebayPri.org and click on "Reports and Surveys."

The prevailing social attitude toward employability skills is that all workers should come to the job with high levels of mastery and therefore should not need training. These skills are viewed as "common sense," and are generally accepted as social norms. Because many educational and job training programs are designed assuming the student already has these skills, training individuals in these skills is challenging.

populated areas. Broadband is available in all of the region's growth and investment areas; however, fiber—which provides ultra-high Internet speeds—is only available in a handful of communities, and many parts of the region, particularly rural areas, still depend on dial-up Internet.

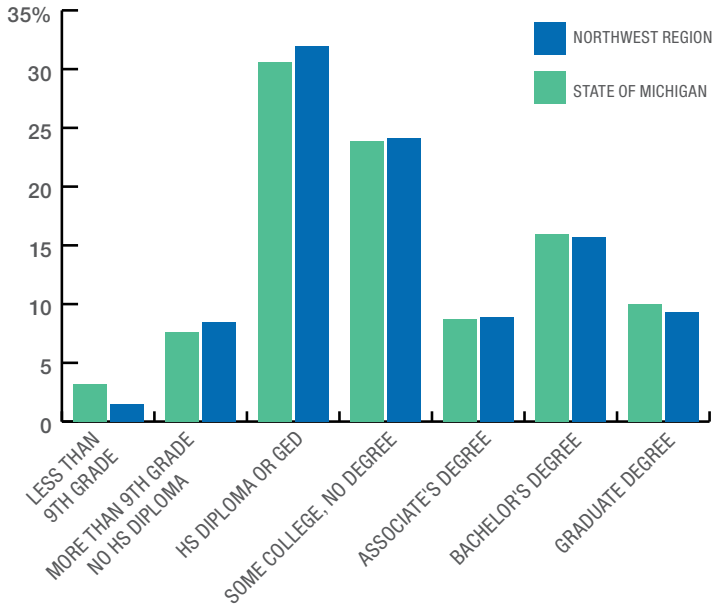
Basic Academic Skills

As the State of Michigan and the region transition into the knowledge economy, the nature of employment is continuously changing. Jobs of all types require more occupational training, higher levels of math, and stronger language and communication skills. Poor math skills, in particular, present obstacles to employment for many workers who have been laid off from obsolete jobs, and now lack the math skills necessary to compete in today's job market. Their use of math on previous jobs was minimal or non-existent; but now, in order to retrain for in-demand positions, these workers need to re-learn math from a very basic level, either through university programs, Adult Education, or non-credit courses as postsecondary institutions.

For those working toward a degree, postsecondary institutions report increasing enrollment in remedial classes. While these high school-level, non-credit classes rarely count toward a degree program, they cost tuition fees for the student, and are necessary in order for a student who is not well-prepared for college-level academics.

For workers that need remediation in basic skills, Adult Education programs provide free access to basic academic learning, both in preparation for a General Equivalency Degree (GED) and preparing to transition to postsecondary training. However, Adult Education has seen tremendous decrease in public funding. State aid for adult education funding in Michigan decreased from $80 million in 2004 to $20 million in 2014. This has caused a corresponding decrease in availability of services, including closure of facilities and access points. There are gaps in the region where customers of adult education services must travel long distances—sometimes an hour one-way—to attend the program. Distance learning services have been set up to partially accommodate this; however, these students often don't have access to computers at home, or are not comfortable or successful with distance learning methods.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



Northwest Michigan's education levels are on par with state averages, but are slightly lower for advanced degrees: more people have achieved a high school diploma than state average, and the number of individuals with some college or an associate's degree is slightly higher. However, occupations in demand call for higher levels of skill training, especially to the postsecondary level. These "middle skill" jobs require more preparation than those with only a high school education currently possess.

Occupational Skills

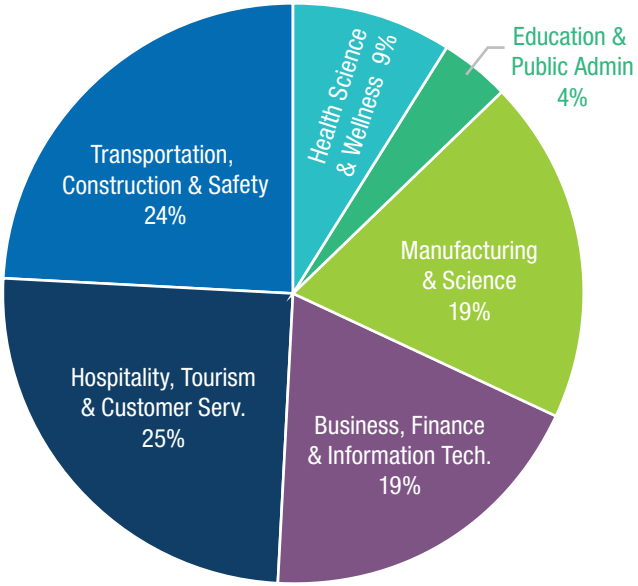
Occupational Skills are those skills that are specific to a given occupation. For instance, a Certified Nurse Aide must be able to take vital signs; welders need a certain competency level in using a welding torch; and software developers must master various coding languages. A skills gap can occur for these occupational skills when training is not available, when training is available but students do not participate in the programs or do not possess the basic academic skills to succeed in the programs, or when the community is unaware of the demand for the occupation. In recnt years, a combination of factors has contributed to the emergence of a nationwide manufacturing-specific skills gap that is clearly impacting Northwest Michigan. Ten to twenty years ago, many manufacturing companies went out of business when contracts for automotive manufacturing were transferred to foreign competitors. Dislocated workers and their families experienced traumatic times, losing their financial security and domestic stability. Entire communities were impacted; due to the loss of these base jobs, other businesses were forced to close, such as restaurants and retail stores.

Manufacturing is now making a comeback and is now more technologically complex and sophisticated. The companies that diversified, invested in new technology, and pursued global customers are now thriving. However, the perception that manufacturing jobs are unstable, and the memory of the trauma to our communities, still lingers; and many students are not interested in pursuing training in manufacturing fields. Therefore, some career tech and postsecondary programs have

closed due to low enrollment, leaving few options for training new and younger members of the workforce in these in-demand occupations. Meanwhile, workers who were dislocated in the economic downturn do not have the more advanced skills to move into these new high-tech manufacturing positions.

This same skills gap can be seen in construction, agriculture, and some healthcare positions. Other positions that require long-term education, such as software development and engineering, are experiencing a skills gap in our region because students with this training are moving to other areas of the state and country. At the same time, the region's workforce is aging; and companies are anticipating an even higher need for skilled workers when their current workforce reaches retirement age.

OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS OF THE WORKFORCE



Opportunities: **Talent**

Many companies are embracing the opportunity to invest in their workforce. Training their current employees to obtain new skills gives a company the flexibility to expand their market and grow, ultimately creating more jobs and economic prosperity for the community. Training options within a company vary, but often include some form of work-based learning that provides hands-on instruction within the work environment. Work-based learning has been proven to be the most successful type of job training, resulting in a 95-98% rate of job retention of at least one year.

In working to address community and regional skills gaps among the workforce, it's important to ensure that educational institutions are preparing students for existing and future in-demand jobs. This involves regular communication and connections among the public workforce system, local employers, and education. There are many venues for ensuring this communication, and many ways in which that it is happening now. For instance, postsecondary education institutions seek input from advisory groups for each program, while Northwest Michigan Works! convenes periodic employer forums that facilitate communication between educators and employers. Additionally, the Northwest Michigan Education Advisory Group offers a regional venue for businesses to communicate their needs to educators and workforce development programs.

Other educational opportunities can help prepare the workforce by developing employability skills and basic academic and computer skills. Because of the region's employability skills gap, all types of educational programs should integrate those skills into their curricula. Learning academic skills in a way that reinforces teamwork, adaptability, and good communication gives students a well-rounded and proper preparation for the real world.

Adult Education programs exist throughout the region, and teach academic and computer skills to adults. They are often recognized for their GED preparation and English as a Second Language programs, but they also offer math and communication classes, even for adults with a high school diploma. Increasing access to these programs, diversifying funding for more stability, and improving awareness of their availability can result in greater and more successful participation in the programs.

Work-based learning has been proven to be the most successful type of job training, resulting in a 95-98% rate of job retention of at least one year.

Supply and Demand

The needs of both employers and workers can be understood using a supply and demand economic model, with some additional influences. The demand side consists of available jobs, which are influenced by businesses and their success rate, ability to grow, and the overall economy. The supply side, on the other hand, consists of workers, and is influenced by the volume, skills, and credentials of the labor pool in an area, as well as opportunities to learn skills that are needed for the available jobs.

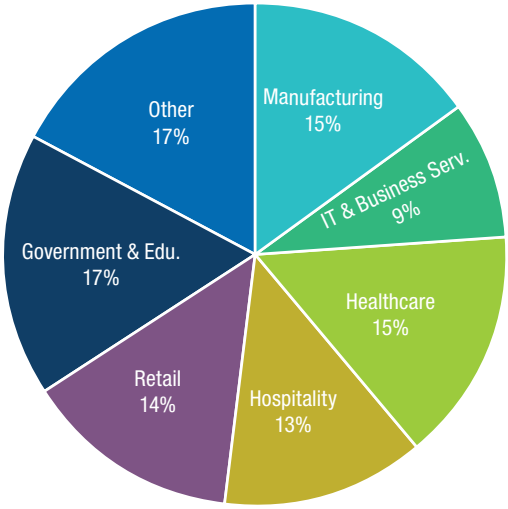
The obvious caveat to relying on the supply and demand model to determine workforce needs is the fact that the supply side consists of people, not widgets. Workers are not manufactured and sold based on market demand; they are developed through years of training, and the volume of workers is relatively constant in a given area. It is essential, then, that communities understand the needs of employers and the current and projected occupational demand.

For purposes of exploring demand and supply as it relates to talent, this *A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan* provides categories that align with the industry clusters identified as emerging and growth areas within the region, including:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Agriculture
- Energy
- Healthcare
- Information Technology/Business Services
- Hospitality

These industry clusters were defined by the state of Michigan's Department of Technology, Management, and Budget and endorsed locally by the Northwest Michigan Workforce Development Board. The state of Michigan's Workforce Development Agency has dedicated resources and staff to supporting cluster approaches within these industries. As a baseline, the following chart shows current regional employment by these industry clusters, as well as for Government/Education

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2014



PRIMARY DEMAND OCCUPATIONS, BY INDUSTRY CLUSTER:

CLUSTER	OCCUPATION
Advanced Manufacturing	Machinists Welders Machine Maintenance Engineers
Agriculture	Equipment Operators Inspectors Farm Workers Sales
Energy	Welders Line Workers Electrical Technician
Healthcare	Certified Nurse Aides Registered Nurses Home Health Aides Health Educators Medical Records Clerk
Hospitality	Server Bartender Cook/Food Prep Retail Sales
Information Technology/Business	Network Administrators Computer Programmers Software Developer Financial Analysts Accountants

Source: State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget; EMSI; Northwest Michigan Works! Business Liaisons

and Other. The "other" category includes a combination of industry clusters that are not accounted for in the other categories, including waste material processing, transportation and warehousing, mining, and more.

In-demand Occupations

Understanding the needs and trends of in-demand occupations is a first step in building the skills needed by the workforce to compete for available jobs: parents that are aware of projected occupational demands can support and encourage their children to pursue training opportunities that lead to those jobs, while teachers, school counselors, and other educational staff can help to guide students toward those careers. Dislocated workers, meanwhile, can use an understanding of in-demand occupational needs to target their career search and obtain training if needed.

The primary source of information about in-demand jobs is labor market data, provided by federal and state repositories, as well as private companies that conduct primary and secondary research. But additional information is often necessary, involving personal relationships with local employers and a thorough understanding of the job market.

While labor market information and data are essential for making projections, and for exploring the current status of the economy and workforce, they can be insufficient when examining demand. For instance, many manufacturers have identified a need for CNC Machinists, yet data alone does not show this as a growth occupation. Input from manufacturers indicates that these employers tend to avoid posting these jobs for a variety of reasons—they do not want to be bombarded with unqualified applicants; they want referrals from sources they trust; and in some cases, the positions are not currently available but could be open if new work comes in. Some companies have stated that they could pursue more and bigger contracts but refrain because they cannot find enough qualified workers.

At this time, industries with the greatest discrepancy between skills needed and skills available are manufacturing, hospitality, and healthcare.

Awareness of in-demand occupations is especially important in respect to developing and offering training programs. Educational institutions are working to respond to the needs of employers, but their business model relies on the student: schools need a minimum number of students enrolled in a program in order for it to be viable. In recent years, educational intuitions at both the high school career tech level and the postsecondary level have closed their CNC programs: despite the desperate need for these workers, enrollment was so low in those programs that they were no longer sustainable. Low enrollment in educational programs does not necessarily indicate a downturn in the need for workers with those skills; in the case of manufacturing, it indicates a lack of interest among students, who connect manufacturing with the mass layoffs experienced during the recession—indicative of a misunderstanding of the new environment in manufacturing.

Just-in-time Training

Just-in-Time Training: Basic Machining is a customized training program that prepares job seekers with the skills that are in high demand by local manufacturers.

In order to create a training program that met the needs of local employers, Northwest Michigan Works led a process that engaged employers at every level. They convened an Employer Forum of local businesses that were looking for machinists. The discussion was structured around four key skill areas: employability; academic; occupational; and company-specific. This discussion allowed educators to develop a program that trained to the common needs of the companies. The result was a new training program that teaches the basics of machining, including blueprint reading, "shop" math, operating a machine, and an introduction to programming. The training also included an explanation of the entire fabrication process; employers made it clear that any worker who understands the start-to-finish process is highly valuable and more attuned to quality control.

North Central Michigan College delivered the training program at Charlevoix Public High School's machine lab. Partner employers provided hands-on job shadow learning opportunities at their facilities. All students in the program were hired into full-time, permanent positions. Northwestern Michigan College also delivered this program in the Traverse City area.

In addition to creating a successful training program, the information collected by this process was widely shared with all partners around the region, including local governments, colleges, school districts, and other employers. This local intelligence provides all workforce partners with an aligned understanding of employer needs and assists them in effective program development.

Opportunities: **Talent**

Building an awareness of the demand for specific jobs and the skills they require will take multiple efforts among a variety of partners: changing community perception and overcoming stereotypes about certain jobs will be a difficult task. However, there are many strategies that communities and organizations can undertake in order to spread the word about employer needs. Partners can help to build awareness of workforce needs by ensuring that data about in-demand occupations is widely accessible. Qualitative information about additional in-demand occupations can also be shared, through media outlets and other outreach efforts. Media outlets can be leveraged to share this data, along with as employer testimonials about the need for workers with specific skills. Strategies that address both immediate hiring needs while creating a long-term pipeline of workers include short-term, intensive training programs and apprenticeships. New marketing efforts for demand occupations that lack interest among students can also help to reinvigorate enrollment in traditional training programs and help to fill the pipeline.

Spreading the Word: Student Video Contest



The Northwest Michigan Education Advisory Group coordinated a video contest that engaged high schools throughout the ten-county region. Teams of students were asked to create a video that illustrates manufacturing facilities and showcases the realities of the current work environment. Students were asked to take the lead in creating, sharing, and promoting these videos to fellow students. Each team partnered with at least one manufacturing employer to learn about the need for skilled workers in the manufacturing industry. Ten student teams submitted videos, and worked with a total of fourteen local employers. Northwestern Michigan College sponsored prizes for the winning teams. Winning videos can be seen at **www.nwm.org/video-challenge.** The Education Advisory Group plans to focus its next Video Challenge on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) careers.

Working Past Barriers

Developing skills needed for in-demand occupations is just one piece of the puzzle for those seeking employment. For many workers in the region, additional factors present barriers that prevent many residents from obtaining and retaining employment. The *Framework for Our Future* included an intensive public input process that featured events, interviews, focus groups, and community dialogues focused on identifying issues for people in poverty and other traditionally underrepresented populations. Input obtained from those in poverty and other community stakeholders identified serious employment-related challenges that are created or exacerbated by housing costs, transportation limitations, daycare costs and availability, low wages and seasonal employment, and disabilities.

473

LICENSED CHILDCARE PROVIDERS (GROUP & HOME CARE)

40

2ND SHIFT AVAILABLE

181

SPECIAL NEEDS

Great Start Connect, 2014

Housing and Transportation

The region's rural geography presents some particular challenges for lower-income members of the workforce. 75% of Northwest Michigan's population is considered to be "rural;" for the many residents that choose to live outside of urban areas, or must do so because of housing costs, there are significant impacts associated with transportation.

Shortages of affordable housing have been well-documented throughout the region; and affordable housing is particularly scarce in or near employment centers. In rural areas, the housing that is available often comes with long commutes to employment, schools, or services, raising transportation costs for those families. Long commutes between the region's more "affordable" housing and its employment centers create added transportation costs for those that "drive til they qualify" - that is, those who move far from employment centers in search of cheaper homes. As a result, the combined costs of housing and transportation consume 57% or more of a typical household's income in the Grand Traverse and Wexford-Missaukee micropolitan regions, leaving little left in household budgets for other basic needs like food and medical expenses.

For lower-and moderate-income households, the economic burden of housing and transportation costs is even heavier: moderate-income households spend more than 70% of their income solely on the combined costs of housing and transportation. Moderate income households in rural areas of the region, meanwhile, can spend as much as 85% of their income on the combined costs of housing and transportation.[3] These untenable financial situations can result in crisis situations, with many lower-income residents forced to choose between traveling to work, paying utility bills, making monthly mortgage payments or rent, purchasing necessities like food, or making needed repairs to the home. Those living in or near poverty often simply don't or can't drive due to these expenses. Many who do own cars—on which they depend for employment and other daily necessities—report that they are "one repair bill away" from not having transportation, which, in the absence of effective and timely transit, can affect their ability to get to work and maintain employment.

Because rural housing leaves households dependent on a private vehicle to get to and from work, households without a car are likely to experience significant transportation obstacles. Transit is reported as the "option of last resort" for individuals that need to get to work. Bus service times rarely coincide with employment schedules, which include very early mornings, late evenings, and weekend hours, particularly for those working service jobs. Additionally, most bus service in the six-county region is demand response, or dial-a-ride, which leaves no assurance that any rider can get to work or to an appointment on time.

Daycare

Availability and affordability of daycare is a challenge for many workers: in Northwest Michigan, daycare costs, on average, about $12,000 annually.[6] In order for a quality daycare center or family home to meet its business needs, it must charge a price that is often too high for low-income workers; and daycare options are typically limited in the evenings and on weekends. Both costs and availability act as major barriers for many individuals, particularly those who work in retail and hospitality, which are high-demand, high-growth industries. In addition, few daycare providers are

able to accept children with special needs, which can be a barrier for a family seeking work in any industry if their children require this level of care.

Wages

The median income of the region varies widely across counties. The highest median income in the region is Leelanau County, at $53,982. The lowest county is Kalkaska, at $39,849, compared to a statewide median income of $48,471.

The current minimum wage in the state of Michigan is $8.15 per hour. For a full-time job, this equates to $16,592 annually. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the 2014 poverty threshold for a family of two people is $15,730, meaning that a single parent of one child could be working full time and still be close to the poverty threshold. In addition, many are questioning the poverty thresholds, and whether they are a true reflection of current cost of living. The formula for determining the poverty threshold was developed several decades ago, when the relationship between housing and transportation was very different, and many households had a stay at home parent. Therefore, the cost of daycare is not factored into the poverty threshold calculation at all, and transportation is reviewed minimally.

A scan of available jobs in the ten-county region indicates a high incidence of hospitality-related positions, which generally have a lower pay scale and are often seasonal. Public input heard throughout the *Framework for Our Future* process indicated that the low wages and temporary or part-time nature of these occupations create difficulties for employees: many don't receive employer benefits, and many are unemployed during the winter months. Even year-round jobs are significantly impacted by seasonality issues, with less work or income for employees off-season. For these lower-wage employees, seasonally-impacted employment can also come with barriers in obtaining services or assistance; in applying for loans or credit; or in renting or purchasing homes.

Regardless of industry, lower wages—and even average wages—often aren't enough for workers to cover basic living expenses in Northwest Michigan. The Michigan League for Public Policy releases an annual report called "Making Ends Meet in Michigan," which explores current costs of living, including housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, taxes, and more. The latest report indicates that the true cost of living for a single parent, statewide, is about $44,000 annually (see chart below).

In Northwest Michigan, wages tend to be lower, and expenses higher, than statewide averages. For a single worker earning the region's average earnings of about $43,000 annually, expenses account for about half of total wages. For single parents earning the region's average income, basic annual living expenses consume all of their annual wages. Workers statewide earn more—$55,786 annually, on average—and pay less for basic living expenses. Expenses for single adult workers statewide consume about 39% of their annual income, and 79% of the wages of single parents (see chart). Workers earning below-average wages in Northwest Michigan struggle to make ends meet, even when working full-time; and the many regional residents that must spend more than average for transportation, heating, or housing costs experience extreme financial instability.

Disabilities

A disability is defined as a condition that acts as a barrier to daily living. Disabilities range from those that are visibly physical, such as someone in a wheelchair, to physical disabilities that can't be seen, to mental illness, and more. Approximately 14% of residents in Traverse City and Cadillac sub-regions have a permanent disability, though the incidence of disabilities increases for the senior and American Indian populations. For residents age 75 and older, those with a disability number 50%. However, temporary disabilities can occur as well: it is estimated that 80% of the entire population will experience a disability at some point in their lifetime.

People with disabilities face additional struggles when seeking employment. There may be a bias or misperception on the part of potential employers, which is frequently linked to a misunderstanding about the person's ability to complete the job. In other cases, employers may struggle to manage the legal implications of interviewing and/

LOCATION	ANNUAL AVERAGE EARNINGS (2014)	ANNUAL EXPENSES & TAXES, SINGLE ADULT	% OF EARNINGS	ANNUAL EXPENSES & TAXES, SINGLE PARENT	% OF EARNINGS
Northwest Michigan	43,420	21,949	51%	43,248	100%
State of Michigan	55,786	21,570	39%	44,164	79%

Source: Living expense data from Michigan League for Public Policy; annual average earnings data from EMSI

or hiring someone with a disability. Concerns about the risk of lawsuits and public scrutiny may discourage employers from hiring those with disabilities, particularly among the many small businesses region-wide that lack human resources staff that may have a better understanding of the legalities involved in hiring those with disabilities.
An additional factor for those with severe disabilities is difficulty in accessing Social Security disability benefits. Individuals whose disabilities prevent them from working can apply for these benefits; however, accessing these benefits is a lengthy and complex process that can leave applicants without income for some time. The application process is significant; volunteers that provide assistance with the disability benefits process indicate that it can take up to 40 hours to complete the application. Determination on benefits, once an application is submitted, can take as much as two years.

$43,248

ANNUAL COSTS OF BASIC LIVING EXPENSES IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN FOR A **SINGLE PARENT**

<

$43,420

AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

$20.79

AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE NEEDED TO SUPPORT BASIC LIVING EXPENSES OF A **SINGLE PARENT** HOUSEHOLD

>

$8.15

CURRENT MINIMUM HOURLY WAGE

Sources: living expenses and living wage data from Michigan League for Public Policy; average annual wage data from EMSI, 2014

Wage Survey

In 2013, Northwest Michigan Council of Governments partnered with Northwestern Michigan College, the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Traverse Area Human Resources Association, to conduct a regional wage survey. This survey asked local employers to report the wage they pay to their employees by occupation. The result is a report that shows the local wage for a given occupation, allowing for variations in company size. The report can be found here: https://www.nmc.edu/training/wage-survey/. Unfortunately, participation in the survey was not as strong as hoped, and therefore the conclusions to be drawn from the data are mixed. However, the group plans to repeat the survey in the future, with more outreach to encourage participation.

EXPENSES PER MONTH AND AS A PERCENT OF THE BASIC NEEDS INCOME LEVEL

			TWO PARENTS	
BASIC NEEDS	SINGLE PERSON	SINGLE PARENT*	BOTH WORKING*	ONE WORKING*
	$530 29%	$681 19%	$681 16%	$681 31%
	N/A	$1,109 30%	$1,109 30%	N/A
	$264 15%	$506 14%	$702 16%	$702 32%
	$393 22%	$393 11%	$653 15%	$393 18%
	$207 12%	$346 9%	$426 10%	$426 19%
	$107 6%	$279 8%	$357 8%	$224 10%
TOTAL EXPENSES	$1,501 84%	$3,314 90%	$3,928 90%	$2,426 109%
TAXES	$296 16%	$366 10%	$433 10%	($199)** (9%)
NET TOTAL EXPENSES & TAXES	$1,797 100%	$3,680 100%	$4,361 100%	$2,227 100%

** With two childeren under 5. **Parentheses indicate a refund.*

Opportunities: **Talent**

Communities across the ten-county region are coming together to discuss and address many of the issues that present barriers for low-income families. Active poverty reduction initiatives throughout the region, as well as human services collaborative groups, United Ways, and other entities, focus on assisting people in poverty and addressing barriers to employment.

Communities have important roles to play in addressing housing, transportation, and other barriers to employment, through zoning and other policies. For instance, in order to address housing and transportation barriers, communities can enact a variety of zoning changes that encourage more affordable or lower-cost housing options near employment centers. They can encourage connected public transit across jurisdictions that will enable people living in rural areas to access job opportunities in cities and villages. Businesses and other entities can also incentivize carpooling and ride shares.

Public meetings scheduled at a time when working individuals can attend, with childcare options, can encourage attendance and input from the region's workforce.

Communities can add to and engage in these discussions and efforts. They can be proactive in ensuring that the voices of those in poverty are heard in order to identify and address the myriad community development issues that impact these populations—including transportation and housing choices. Public meetings scheduled at a time when working individuals can attend, with childcare options, can encourage attendance and input from the region's workforce. In addition, community advocates can mentor individuals to attend community meetings to express their perspective related to the topic at hand; and can also work to regularly share input from underrepresented populations with decision-makers.

In order to address childcare barriers, communities can encourage more childcare centers and group homes by ensuring that uses are permitted and supported by local policies. Existing and future childcare providers should offer flexible scheduling and options for evenings and weekends. Businesses and other entities can offer on-site childcare, additional benefit options to assist workers with the costs of childcare, and more.

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. 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.

Talent Retention and Attraction

Northwest Michigan boasts recreation opportunities that attract millions of tourists every year. Hundreds of miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, nearly 2,000 inland lakes, hundreds of parks and trails, and local festivals are just a few of the community assets enjoyed by residents and visitors from all walks of life.

The region's many recreation assets and high quality of life attract visitors and permanent residents alike, contributing to population growth. However, because of its desirability as a retirement destination, Northwest Michigan's population growth is occurring primarily among seniors, while younger populations decline. The number of those aged 65+ increased between 2000-2010, constituting the majority of Northwest Michigan's population growth between 2000-2010. With fewer jobs available during the recession, many residents and their families left the area to find employment opportunities elsewhere, reflected by a 23% decline in individuals aged 35-44. Because this age group is most likely to be part of a household with children at home, the region also experienced an 8% decline in the number of all individuals under the age of 18—despite overall regional growth of about 6%.

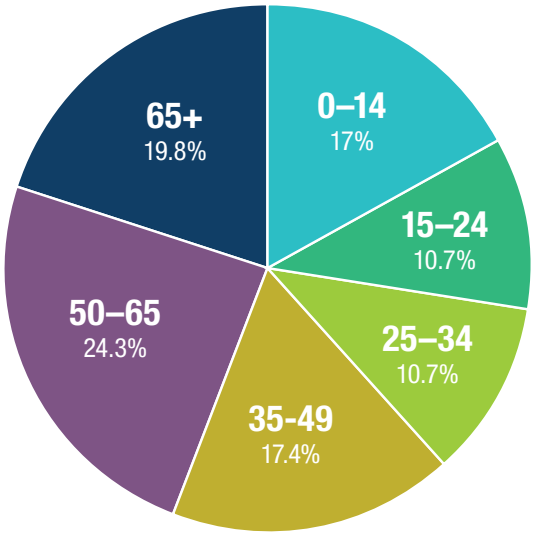
The region's changing population dynamic has far-reaching implications for workforce and business growth. It has become a priority to retain young talent who have ties to the area, while simultaneously working to attract new workers and entrepreneurs through quality of life assets including recreation, education, and other place-based amenities.

Quality of Life

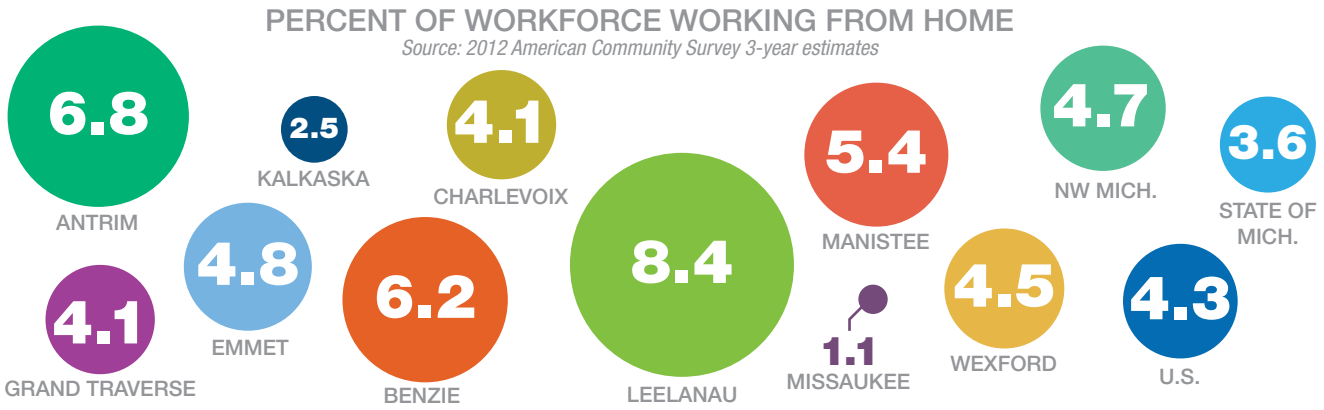
Quality of life is composed of a wide variety of factors, including access to quality recreation, education, and employment opportunities in a safe, healthy, and vibrant environment. Quality schools make up an important aspect of a high quality of life, and Northwest Michigan's public and charter schools offer a variety of high-quality educational opportunities: 4 of the region's public schools are ranked among the State of Michigan's top 20 schools, based on test scores and socioeconomic status.[8] In addition, public, charter, and private schools are exploring new options that support various learning styles, including Montessori, International Baccalaureate, Reggio Emilia, and more curricula that appeal to families. Traditional educational programs are abundant as well, and several show higher-than-state average test scores. Career and technical education opportunities are available in most areas, and offer internships and co-op placements that connect young people to immediate employment or continued education following the program.

The small-town and rural character that is evident throughout the region is desirable to young and old alike, drawing new residents and visitors annually. However, with a decline in the region's young people and families, many residents are concerned about the "brain drain." This occurs when talented young people who grew up in the community move to other areas after completing their education. The population of residents age 25 to 44 decreased by 28% from 2000 to 2010.[9]

REGIONAL AGE DEMOGRAPHICS



Most community leaders would like to retain young talent, but recognize the challenges in offering employment and business opportunities that compete with more populous regions, and many communities also lack the housing choices or lifestyle amenities that many young people and families are looking for. The Millennial generation—the population group born after 1980—tend to relocate to vibrant, entertaining locations that feature a high degree of walkability and opportunities to socialize. The ability to attract these individuals depends on factors including a high quality of place; employment and education opportunities; and the housing options that they want and can afford. However, significant shortages of affordable housing are documented in communities throughout the region, and pressure on the rental market from seniors, young people, and those that experienced foreclosure is resulting in serious difficulties in obtaining rentals for individuals throughout the region. In addition, much of the region's housing stock is composed of single-family homes, with few options for apartments or multi-family homes.



Aging Communities

The population of communities around the ten-county region has been trending toward an aging demographic for the last two decades. The high quality of life makes the region a desirable location for retirement. Data shows that the population of residents age 60 to 64 increased by 53% from 2000 to 2010.

With an aging population comes both challenges and opportunities for communities. Healthcare infrastructure and access are critically important, in order to support the higher need for care among this age group. Opportunities for workers in all facets of health care are growing, making health care one of the region's highest demand industries. Health care institutions throughout the region are constantly recruiting for skilled workers in every occupation, including registered nurses, certified nurse aides, medical billing and coding, and more. These facilities especially struggle with physician recruitment, citing a lack of diversity available in the region as the primary barrier to attracting new physicians to the area. The ethnic population of Northwest Michigan is about 93% Christian/Caucasian.[11] Physicians of other ethnicities, races, or religions may not find the cultural supports they desire for their families, including food, celebrations, language, and religious community.

Virtual Workers

Technology is enabling new employment trends throughout the region: with strong internet infrastructure, individuals can tele-commute, or work from home for companies around the world. Employees or entrepreneurs can work in teams via live video connection, and use web-based software to manage project tasks, while in-person meetings or sales calls can be easily arranged because of flight availability from local airports. This type of employment can provide wages that are consistent with more populous areas, but provide workers the opportunity to choose where they live and work, rather than relocating to communities for employment. It requires infrastructure like broadband and fiber that supports the high Internet speeds needed for online communication and other transactions.

Business Opportunities

Over half of the region's business establishments (59%) are small establishments, employing just 1-4 workers. A supportive community and regulatory environment can aid in building, sustaining and growing these small businesses in an increasingly entrepreneurial and competitive global economy.

Entrepreneurs from all walks of life are starting micro-businesses, often as a side business for individuals who need additional income or who simply have a hobby. With a little success and some revenue, these businesses can then begin to grow, increasing sales, moving out of the home office or garage, and creating jobs. These supports are particularly important for very small business, or micro-business, start-ups. Micro-businesses are defined by the U.S. Small Business Administration as having sales of less than $35,000 annually and less than five employees; although many consist of a single proprietor with no direct staff.

In addition to having the aptitude, drive, and sales abilities needed to sell the business idea to investors, banks, and eventually customers, small businesses and micro-business start-ups often require technical expertise in business planning and development, along with regulatory and financial supports such as micro-loans, tax incentives, or zoning provisions.

Because many micro-businesses, in particular, start within homes and garages, a regulatory environment is needed to allow entrepreneurs to build and expand their home-based business while keeping overall costs down. Yet home-based businesses and cottage industries are regulated by local zoning. While many communities permit these activities, oftentimes regulations act as hurdles that can add additional costs or discourage expansion of the business.

During the three to four years following the Great Recession, businesses had difficulty accessing capital. Bank loans are a regular need for businesses; they rely on periodic infusion of funds in order to manage cash flow, adjust to seasonal fluctuations, and/or explore a new product line or service.

When banks were suddenly calling in risky debt, and severely limiting their loans, many businesses were unable to grow and add jobs; or they closed altogether and laid-off large quantities of workers.

In 2014, banks are more amenable to loans for small businesses, and accept a certain amount of risk. The requirements for collateral and credit are still much higher than prior to the recession, so some very small companies are still unable to access funds. However, Community Development Financial Institutions are able to take on more risk and support loans that banks cannot take on. In addition, communities are finding creative ways to help businesses, by providing financial support such as matched Individual Development Accounts and revolving loan funds.

Live - Work - Play

As a result of the region's 2012 Talent Summit and as part of the Regional Prosperity Initiative, a new effort has been launched to promote the quality of life in the region. A "Live-Work-Play" Web Site has been established that will feature assets of our region, including opportunities for employment, business expansion, education, real estate, and recreation. The site prominently displays the quality of life attributes of the region, and then acts as a portal, linking to existing resources and information. The site is organized in such a way that visitors will easily see the linkages among communities and the many assets of the region. The site is promoted widely, leveraging the success of the existing MyNorth marketing effort. The web site, MyNorth.com, has been in operation since 2007, and has built a following of almost one million visitors per year, mostly those who live outside the region. This public-private partnership helps communities to promote the area as a great place to Live, Work, and Play.

Opportunities: **Talent**

Attracting and retaining the talent needed to support existing businesses and attract new industry requires a number of assets and initiatives that can be led by communities, including regulatory supports, appropriate infrastructure, and a strong sense of place.

Attracting talent also requires cultivation of an entrepreneurial culture, which communities can support through policy and incentives. Local or regional economic development agencies or community development financing institutions (CDFIs) can offer flexible financing options, such as revolving loan funds or micro-loans, that provide the capital needed for businesses to grow. Initiatives like start-up business incubators can provide space and resources for businesses to develop new products or services, while zoning can support entrepreneurial activity by removing obstacles to home-based businesses or cottage industries and allow individuals to begin and gradually expand their business concept. In addition, improvements to local permitting and approval processes can reduce costs and lower risk for investors. Local governments and economic development partners can also help by providing the information needed to support new endeavors, such as market studies that can identify the potential for new development or business in the region's communities.

Attracting talent also requires cultivation of an entrepreneurial culture, which communities can support through policy and incentives.

Communities can prioritize activities that enhance local assets that support a high quality of life, such as recreational assets like trails or parks; low housing costs; business-friendly downtowns; or great job opportunities. Placemaking offers many ways, such as streetscape improvement projects, wayfinding, trail connections, affordable housing, events and festivals, and historic preservation, that enable communities to build on local strengths to improve community vitality and sense of place. In addition to building on these assets, a strong community marketing or promotion initiative can help to draw new residents and visitors. One important new marketing opportunity that communities can take advantage of is the new regional MyNorth.com website currently in development that will feature regional assets, including opportunities for employment, business expansion, education, real estate, and recreation. The site prominently displays the quality of life attributes of the region and acts as a portal, linking to existing resources and information.

Because business growth and talent attraction partly depend on reliable, cost-effective infrastructure, communities can also invest in infrastructure like broadband, fiber, or community-wide wifi that supports today's high-tech businesses. Communities can vary funding mechanisms to improve the efficiency, functionality, and costs of infrastructure, and can also consider partnerships with other communities or agencies that lower costs overall.

Local Implementation Checklist: Talent

Planning and zoning are important implementation tools for communities that are working to meet talent and workforce development needs. The Local Implementation Checklist identifies some examples of how communities in Northwest Michigan and other parts of Michigan have addressed talent and workforce development in their local policies. Communities may consider this language, and/or *Framework for Our Future* Strategies, when updating their own local policies.

Master Plan Goals and Objectives

A master plan is a guide that's intended to shape local decisions about managing resources, directing growth, and how development should be designed. Master plans help the community understand current conditions, build a vision for the future, make recommendations about actions to take on various community issues, and act as the foundation for zoning ordinances.

Communities have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging talent and workforce development, which create significant opportunities to enhance economic development. Incorporating talent and workforce development goals into the local master plan can be an important first step in enhancing the community's talent assets and economic opportunities. Some sample master plan language follows:

Train and maintain a skilled workforce that can adapt and succeed in changing economic times

- ☐ Work with educational institutions to ensure quality local education and life-long learning opportunities
- ☐ Complete a housing plan to ensure there is sufficient workforce housing to maintain the service economy
- ☐ Create redevelopment concept plans for former industrial sites that will enhance neighborhoods with a mix of housing, and business incubator spaces
- ☐ Work with area chambers of commerce to support further development and growth of small, entrepreneurial businesses and retention/attraction of young professionals
- ☐ Work with area local governments to develop community-wide broadband communications
- ☐ Develop infrastructure that will support technologically advanced companies
- ☐ Ensure adequate transportation infrastructure to support regional economic development and industry retention

Expand economic development opportunities for residents, and attract a younger generation of neighbors

- ☐ Work to attract higher education opportunities to locate in the Village such as a community college, adult continuing education classes, and satellite courses
- ☐ Develop a community center that would house a library, adult education classrooms, and recreational opportunities
- ☐ Seek opportunities to provide affordable space that would help serve as an incubator for small businesses, non-profits, telecommuters, and other economic development activities

Provide an increased and wider variety of employment opportunities

- ☐ Cooperate with county, regional, state and federal agencies to aid in development and maintenance of manpower training and vocational rehabilitation programs to combat unemployment or underemployment
- ☐ Provide the roads, services, facilities and educational opportunities necessary to gain and keep qualified personnel for area employers

Support the attraction of new business, industry, and workforce and enhance existing business

- ☐ Encourage collaboration between employers, employees, and existing educational facilities to establish an educated, quality, and sustaining workforce
- ☐ Encourage the development of job training and education to increase employee job skills
- ☐ Identify future niches for economic growth, and update job retention and development planning to accommodate changing local economic markets due to a global economy
- ☐ Promote cultural diversity to attract multi-national business and industry

Local Implementation Checklist: Talent

Diversify the economic base to create more job opportunities and to create specialty groups

- ☐ Work with the community college to develop locally available hospitality courses and degree programs to educate workers to energize a local spirit of hospitality
- ☐ Promote more child care services by businesses to enhance employment opportunities for more citizens

Attract and retain more technology-based businesses

- ☐ Work with the community college and area high schools to expand technology-based curriculums to prepare the workforce for technology-related jobs
- ☐ Advocate for expansion and relocation of smaller business and start-up companies, including home-based business

Zoning Ordinance Elements

Zoning ordinances are local laws that regulate land and buildings in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens. It helps define how properties are used, what new buildings look like, and how much development can occur in a community.

Zoning and other ordinances can create a supportive regulatory environment that allows for the flexibility needed by creative and entrepreneurial businesses and cultural activities. Zoning elements that might support talent and workforce development include:

- ☐ Identify underutilized and brownfield properties, and seek zoning changes to encourage revitalization
- ☐ Allow for home-based occupations and cottage industries
- ☐ Allow additional live-work units and high-density residential apartments on upper floors of commercial buildings
- ☐ Promote a variety of innovative zoning techniques like Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), cluster zoning and open space preservation to encourage workforce housing to be sited nearer to employment areas

Framework Strategies

As a resource for communities in Northwest Michigan, the *Framework for Our Future* identifies a number of strategies and actions that communities can take locally to address their specific needs. Because each community identifies their own goals, through public input, local discussions, and need analyses, the strategies and actions identified in the *Framework* are not intended as recommendations for any communities to implement or adopt. Rather, they are provided as a resource list of potential actions that, if desired, can be taken locally and/or used as model language for local master plans, organizational strategic plans, and other policy documents, to address various community needs.

The strategies and actions in the *Framework* were developed from public input and local, regional, statewide, and national sources. Many are based on public input obtained during the *Framework for Our Future* process in events, focus groups, interviews, online discussions, and community dialogues, and were also drawn from or based on master plan language from existing adopted master plans within and outside the region. Others reflect state or national best practices designed to address specific issues.

Strategies are grouped around four major themes that reflect needs and potential actions for each community issue.

Education, Data & Outreach. Often, taking action on a community need requires a solid understanding of the need, as well as public consensus on the appropriate course of action. *Education, Data, & Outreach* strategies address data gaps, outreach needs, and educational opportunities that can help to improve community understanding and awareness around a particular issue.

Planning & Policy. Many community issues can be addressed in part by local policy, such as master plans and zoning ordinances. *Planning & Policy* strategies identify broad policy goals and specific changes to master plans or zoning ordinances that can impact a particular issue.

Funding & Incentives. Communities can use funding and incentive tools to encourage private, public, and nonprofit initiatives and activities that meet local goals. *Funding & Incentives* strategies identify opportunities that can enhance organizational capacities, as well incentives that may help communities work with the private sector and others to meet local goals.

Development & Implementation. Goals for each community issue center around programs, development or initiatives that directly and tangibly impact community needs. *Development & Implementation* goals include specific strategies designed for on-the-ground activities and bricks-and-mortar implementation.

Each strategy includes additional information intended to aid in implementation, including:

Why?

Each strategy is designed to address a certain issue. Information is provided to detail specific community needs that might be met through implementation of the strategy.

Actions

To implement each strategy, communities can consider taking action in a number of ways. This section identifies some specific actions that communities might consider to reach local goals

Tools & Resources

A number of existing tools or resources are available to partners that are interested in taking action on a particular strategy. This section identifies, and provides links to, tools and resources such as:

- Research or background studies that can help communities identify specific community needs in order to develop appropriate policy or initiatives
- The *Framework for Our Future Action Guide*, which provides details and implementation guidance for planning and zoning actions identified in the *Framework*
- Guidebooks and workbooks that provide step-by-step information on actions and the implementation process
- Examples of where the action has been implemented regionally
- Local, regional, state, or national reference documents that can provide additional guidance

Links to all resources are available online at **www.nwm.org/rpi**.

Measures

Communities can track progress toward these goals and actions by benchmarking data identified in this section. While some measurement data will be locally generated and tracked, many indicators can be accessed on the regional data portal **www.benchmarksnorthwest.org**.

Talent: Data, Education & Outreach

Improve knowledge and understanding of talent development needs, programs, and opportunities

Strategy 1	**Raise awareness of in-demand occupations and the skills they require**	
Why?	The skills gap is partly caused by a lack of understanding about occupations in demand. Knowing which jobs have the best potential for placement gives young people, dislocated workers, and employers the knowledge they need to plan for their futures.	
Actions	Provide tours of local companies for students and families	Leverage media networks for marketing career opportunities to students, parents, and adults
	Promote the "Career Spotlight" career information campaign, including videos that feature people working in demand occupations	Develop a local "Hot Jobs" report that incorporates labor market information, local employer input, and projections based on trends and that is updated yearly
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Works! Youth Employment/Education Services (YES) program	Northwest Michigan Works! Five-Year Strategic Plan for delivery of Workforce Investment Act Services
	Career Spotlight	
Strategy 2	**Raise awareness of basic skill needs, including math, reading, and writing**	
Why?	Today's job market requires higher levels of academic skill. Postsecondary training programs cite higher numbers of students who are not prepared academically to enter college level courses. It is essential for young people, parents, dislocated workers, employers, and communities to know about the increased need for this type of education, as well as the importance of early childhood learning for developing these skills.	
Actions	Promote existing Adult Education programs and increase their availability throughout the region	Promote the need for higher academic skill levels, especially math, in today's job market
	Develop basic skills refresher courses for adults	Encourage students to take higher levels of math and English classes while still in school
	Encourage investment in Early Childhood Education, giving young people the strong start they need in order to maintain basic skills for a lifetime	
Tools & Resources	Michigan Great Start Program	Michigan National Career Readiness Certificate
	Michigan Turnaround Plan	

Strategy 3	**Raise awareness of the need for improved employability skills, such as reliability, teamwork, adaptability, and general work ethic.**	
Why?	Employability skills are often considered to be “common sense” that is taught by parents to children; however, employers cite the need for employability skills as their primary workforce issue. Ensuring that these skills are included in job training can improve the ability of workers to obtain and retain employment.	
Actions	Incorporate employability skills training into existing curriculum at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels	Include information about need for employability skills in public awareness campaigns about training programs and in-demand occupations
	Develop employability skills classes for adults	Provide mentoring opportunities for individuals who struggle with employability skills
Tools & Resources	eLearning Soft Skills Program	Employer Survey of Skills, Habits & Attributes for Workplace Success
Strategy 4	**Raise awareness of training opportunities**	
Why?	Training programs are available that will help the unemployed and underemployed to access better jobs. However, few people are aware of the availability of the programs and how to access them. Promotion and outreach will help connect workers with the training they need to obtain and retain employment.	
Actions	Create a regional marketing campaign for training programs	Improve marketing efforts of existing programs by connecting multiple communications channels
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Works!	Goodwill of Northern Michigan
	Northwest Michigan Workforce Development Board, by the Education Advisory Group Student Video Contest	Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and Northwest Michigan Works! Manufacturing Training Programs Asset Map

Talent Development: Planning & Policy

Coordinate policies, plans, & ordinances that support business and entrepreneurial opportunities

Strategy 1	**Consider planning & zoning policies that encourage and support innovative, entrepreneurial business and industrial development**	
Why?	Some new businesses or entrepreneurs encounter zoning or other regulatory obstacles when beginning or expanding businesses. Zoning policies that provide creative development or business options can accommodate start-ups and business growth.	
Actions	Consider zoning or other policy changes to allow and encourage new types of business.	Consider form-based or other flexible zoning changes to encourage adaptive re-use of buildings for new business or entrepreneurial activity
	Allow and encourage home-based businesses	Consider zoning changes to provide incubator opportunities
Tools & Resources	*A Framework for Our Future Action Guide*	
Strategy 2	**Provide a flexible, efficient, regulatory structure and economic development supports**	
Why?	Multi-layered and complex review and approval processes can slow or discourage new investment. Streamlining review procedures can reduce cost and risk for new development.	
Actions	Create an informational and permitting one-stop shop for entrepreneurs	Consider opportunities to streamline permitting and zoning
	Consider form-based zoning approaches that streamline the administrative and review process	
Tools & Resources	*A Framework for Our Future Action Guide*	The Northwest Michigan Business Atlas
Strategy 3	**Promote planning & zoning policies as "business friendly" to attract more and new entrepreneurs**	
Why?	Potential entrepreneurs need to know which communities are best suited for their start-up plans. Promoting business-friendly environments is good for a community, and helping entrepreneurs navigate planning processes, can encourage new business investment in the community.	
Actions	Utilize local and statewide media networks to market business friendly communities	Provide regular education and workshops that explain planning and zoning policies to entrepreneurs
Tools & Resources	www.mynorth.com	*Citizens Guide to Planning and Zoning*
	Citizen Planner program	Business Atlas
	US Small Business Administration: Starting a Business	

Talent Development: Financing & Incentives

Support & incentivize workforce and business development activities

Strategy 1	**Support & incentivize workforce and business development activities**	
Why?	Start-ups need capital to get their business going, maintain cash-flow, and market their offerings; but barriers may prevent them from accessing the capital they need. Providing financial or technical support can encourage new entrepreneurial activity and investment.	
Actions	Support and promote revolving loan fund opportunities available through local or regional agencies	Establish local and/or regional trust funds for entrepreneurs
	Encourage investment in local businesses	Encourage and support new regionalized lending programs
	Facilitate partnerships to provide linkages between business/ entrepreneurs and technical assistance providers	
Tools & Resources	The Business Atlas: www.businessatlas.org	Northwest region Small Business Lending Continuum
	MI - Small Business Development Center – Northwest Region	Traverse Connect
	Northern Lakes Economic Alliance	Alliance for Economic Success in Manistee
Strategy 2	**Develop funding mechanisms and other opportunities to support job training**	
Why?	Trainings are need for developing the workforce skills needed for the new economy, but reduced funding has eliminated some job training offerings, and greatly minimized others. Partnerships and alternative funding sources can improve opportunities and access to job training.	
Actions	Establish low-interest loans or grants for adults returning to school	Encourage businesses to “sponsor” students in job training programs
	Encourage work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeship and internship programs	
Tools & Resources	Michigan Advanced Technician Training (MAT2)	Northwest Michigan Apprenticeship Program
	Pure Michigan Talent Connect - Internship opportunities, posted as jobs or links to matching services	Prima Civitas Internship Toolkit

Strategy 3	Incentivize improved compensation for traditionally low-paying jobs	
Why?	Workers in Northwest Michigan, on average, earn less than workers statewide while contending with higher living costs. Individuals who work in lower-paying jobs have difficulty making ends meet, and often rely on subsidy to pay the bills. Encouraging and supporting employers to improve compensation can reduce the need for family subsidy while creating a competitive employment environment that can attract workers.	
Actions	Recognize and promote companies that implement supportive Human Resources practices	Work with employers to understand barriers to increasing compensation
	Encourage non-traditional compensation packages, including benefits, childcare, training, etc.	
Tools & Resources	Making Ends Meet in Michigan	

Talent Development: Development & Implementation

Increase job access & entrepreneurial opportunities

Strategy 1	**Increase work-based learning opportunities**	
Why?	Work-based learning offers hands-on learning in a real-world work environment, gives workers a chance to learn using multiple methodologies, and involves businesses at a higher level than when traditional classroom training is used.	
Actions	Encourage local employers to allow students into facilities for job shadow, tours, and informational interviews	Develop more co-cop programming and placement opportunities for students in secondary education
	Develop apprenticeship programs	Offer more internship opportunities for adults in re-training programs
	Increase Work Experience programming for youth through the workforce development system (additional funding)	
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Workforce Development Board's Strategic Agenda	Northwest Michigan Works! work-based learning scholarships, Just-in-Time training and On-the-Job training programs
	Northwest Michigan Works! Youth Employment/Education Services (YES) program	Northwest Michigan Apprenticeship
	Pure Michigan Talent Connect - Internship opportunities	Prima Civitas Internship Toolkit
	Goodwill of Northern Michigan	
Strategy 2	**Expand childcare options**	
Why?	One of the primary barriers to employment for local workers is access to affordable, quality childcare that is available on their work schedule. The region does not have enough offerings of childcare programs on 2nd shift schedule and that take children with special needs.	
Actions	Offer free childcare co-ops at community based organizations	Encourage individuals to start childcare programs in their homes
	Incentivixe existing childcare programs to offer 2nd shift schedules and take children with special needs	
Tools & Resources	Great Start Connect	Michigan Department of Human Services Child Care assistance

Strategy 3	Attract and retain talent	
Why?	The quantity of workers with the necessary skills does not match the need in the region. The population of the region is increasing in retirement-aged residents, but decreasing in working-aged residents. Attracting and retaining workers and new residents to the region will help meet the business and investment needs created by the region's "skills gap."	
Actions	Promote quality of life in the region	Provide more multi-cultural opportunities and events
	Implement "attract back" activities for high school and college graduates of the region	Develop a single point of information for recruitment and retention strategies
	Develop a campaign to educate employers about factors that attract young people	Create a regional reputation that is welcoming and innovative (Michigan Turnaround Plan)
Tools & Resources	www.mynorth.com	Northern Michigan Community Placemaking Guidebook
	CreateMiPlace.org	The Employment Training Council (ETC) workshops
Strategy 4	**Increase diversity of job opportunities; improve public perception about the availability of middle and higher level job options**	
Why?	The region's image as a tourist destination creates the perception that hospitality jobs form the bulk of available jobs. However, there are many job options in other sectors. In addition, we should encourage development of more and better job opportunities.	
Actions	Encourage new business ventures in high growth industries	Develop talent co-ops for industry-specific talent needs
	Create incubators that foster innovation and safe environments for experimentation	
Tools & Resources	www.businessatlas.org	MI - Small Business Development Center – Northwest Region
Strategy 5	**Increase job training opportunities**	
Why?	Training to address the skills gap is available but not in high enough volume to address the need. Increasing the availability of and access to job training can help employers fill positions while workers obtain needed employment.	
Actions	Partner with employers for on-the-job training	Offer more short-term "just-in-time" training programs
	Increase grant opportunities for adults returning to school	
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Works! On-the-Job Training, scholarships for occupational training, and apprenticeship programs	Goodwill Industries of Northern Michigan short-term, hands-on training in retail, food service, commercial cleaning, and other high demand occupations
	College for Adult Students	

Strategy 6	Develop sector initiatives and strategies to align workforce and economic development activities	
Why?	Sector-based initiatives convene groups with common workforce and economic development needs. This allows them to work together to leverage resources and align strategies	
Actions	Ensure support and buy-in from regional and local stakeholders	Develop funding mechanisms to support activities
	Identify sectors of prominence in the region and select lead organizations to convene the groups	
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Council of Governments regional skills alliances	The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative

References

1. Northwest Michigan Works!, On-the-Job Training, 2010-2014.
2. June 2014, Pure Michigan Talent Connect, Skill Supply and Demand Report
3. Center for Neighborhood Technology, H+T Affordability Index
4. NWMCOG, Fair Housing and Equity Assessment)
5. NWMCOG, Fair Housing and Equity Assessment)
6. Michigan League for Public Policy, 2014. Making Ends Meet
7. US Census Bureau, 2012 American Communities Survey 3-year estimates
8. Center for Michigan, Bridge Michigan, 2013. “Academic State Champs” http://bridgemi.com/2014/01/searchable-database-academic-state-champs/
9. US Census Bureau, 2012 American Communities Survey 3-year estimates
10. US Census Bureau, 2012 American Communities Survey 3-year estimates
11. US Census Bureau, 2012 American Communities Survey 3-year estimates
12. US Census Bureau, 2012 Economic Census