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Regional Plan

Talent Advancement
Strategies for
Northwest Michigan

Talent Advancement Strategies
For Northwest Michigan

The 10-county region of Northwestern lower Michigan offers a quality of life that is the envy of urban areas around the world. Small towns, plentiful fresh water, numerous recreation opportunities, and cultural amenities make it the ultimate destination for raising a family, starting a business, or beginning a career.

The region is not without its challenges, though. Large geographic expanses scattered with bodies of water make travel routes long and laborious. Low population density results in limited resources, many of which are allocated based on census numbers. The area is especially appealing to retirees, causing a shift in population demographics – retirement age numbers are growing while the working age population is declining. Housing, childcare, and transportation costs are high, yet the distribution of jobs across the economy is heavy in lower-paying service jobs, many of which are seasonal.

Despite these many challenges, the communities within the region are passionate and dedicated to their home. Residents are proud of their small towns and hopeful for a prosperous future. Many local organizations work hard every day to promote the region, develop talent, and offer opportunities for career and business success.

This plan for *Talent Advancement in Northwest Michigan* identifies key strategies that support talent attraction, development, and retention activities. Its scope is region-wide, offering strategies that will have the most impact if implemented collaboratively or via independent but aligned efforts. It is our hope that this plan will be utilized in the following ways:

- Provide strategic direction to stakeholders that need guidance on where to focus limited resources;

- Provide a framework for collaboration across multiple entities involved in this work; and

- Provide a common purpose for all of the region's talent attraction, development, and retention efforts.

This plan was created for Networks Northwest by the independent firm Strategic Policy Consultants.

SPC STRATEGICPOLICY CONSULTANTS

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Executive Summary

Numerous stakeholders participated in the development of this plan, including representatives from educational institutions, economic development organizations, and the workforce development system. They offered significant guidance in refining the strategies described here. In addition, we conducted research on existing strategies and plans throughout the region, as well as common and best practices for talent attraction, development, and retention around the country.

Before developing our recommended strategies, we reviewed the current state of several relevant factors. These factors included unemployment rate, projected job demand, and credential attainment rate, among others. To make sense of these factors and to ensure that we were looking at the most relevant, we used the concept of Demand and Supply. This allowed us to adequately describe the current state of Talent in the region. Demand indicates that workers are needed for service positions, which is a significant portion of the economy. However, professional jobs are growing, and the projected need outstrips projected supply. Increases in skills, evidenced by credential attainment, along with higher numbers of workers are needed in the region to fill the pipeline.

Key Demand and Supply Statistics:

- The *Accommodation and Food Service* and *Retail Trade* industries currently provide 26% of the total jobs.

- High-wage jobs are projected to increase in healthcare, information technology, advanced manufacturing, construction, and finance.

- Integration Skills (also called "soft skills") are the most cited skill need among area employers across all industries, and have become more important than ever in the age of COVID.

- Almost 60% of the region's workforce have less than an associate's degree.

- The working age population has decreased in the last five years, with retirement or near-retirement age population comprising the majority of overall population growth.

This current state of talent reveals a pressing need that serves as the primary purpose of this plan: to improve **talent capacity** across the region. "Talent capacity" means a need for higher *numbers* of workers, as well as *skills* that match with current and projected industry needs.

How do we improve talent capacity? This plan proposes three primary strategies that increase **talent advancement** – a key framework that guided the development and refinement of these strategies. The concept of talent advancement aligns the many aspects of talent attraction, development, and retention under a primary principle: all activities should help to improve the career trajectory of our talent. Whether attracting a worker to the area, or helping a worker with teamwork skills, or keeping a worker here by offering a micro-credential, our region must consistently and continuously offer opportunities for our talent to advance.

The Strategies Proposed in this Plan are as Follows:

- *Regional Promotion*, focusing on Virtual Work, High-Paying Jobs, and Entrepreneurship;

- *Modular Training*, focusing on Micro-credentials, Integration Skills, and Company-based Trainings; and

- *Employer Connections*, focusing on Education/Employer Relationships and Employer-based Student Experiences.

In order to gauge our success, the region should monitor two key indicators, with the goal of increasing both over time: *Credential Attainment* (especially non-degree credentials that are recognized by local industry) and *Working-age Population*.

In summary, talent attraction, development, and retention efforts in the Northwest Michigan region must improve talent capacity by offering talent advancement opportunities. To do so effectively, regional promotion, modular training, and employer connections are paramount.
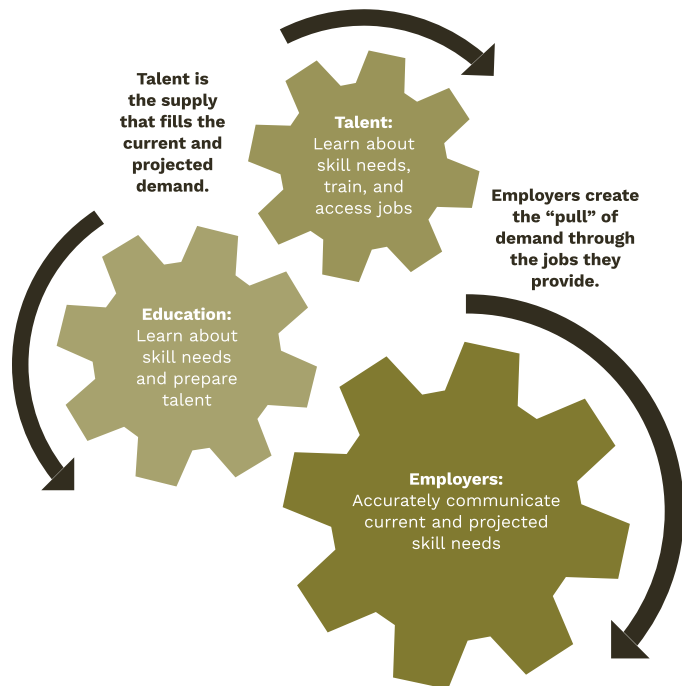
Process

The process of creating this plan began with gathering input from a variety of stakeholders who are involved in any aspect of talent attraction, development, and retention. Through a series of interviews, we discussed the needs of local employers prior to, during, and following the COVID global pandemic. These discussions generating many ideas for potential strategies that could address those needs. In addition, we conducted thorough research into plans, models, and frameworks that address talent attraction, development, and retention. As strategies began to surface throughout the process, we refined them into a survey, which was shared with all stakeholders for input on those that would have the most impact. The survey helped to prioritize these strategies. In addition, we created a "compass" through the principle of Talent Advancement – it was through this lens that we were able to narrow the field from dozens of potential strategies to the three main categories and sub-strategies presented in this report.

The following entities provided input throughout the process:

- Northwest Michigan Works
- Northern Lakes Economic Alliance
- TraverseConnect
- 20Fathoms
- Manistee Chamber of Commerce
- Alliance for Economic Success
- Cadillac Chamber of Commerce
- Newton's Road
- North Central Michigan College
- Northwestern Michigan College
- West Shore Community College
- Baker College of Cadillac
- Char-Em ISD
- Traverse Bay Area ISD
- Wexford-Missaukee ISD
- MiSTEM
- Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center
- Small Business Development Center
- Procurement Technical Assistance Center
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation

Supply and Demand

In order to better understand the many factors related to talent attraction, development, and retention, consider the economic concept of supply and demand. The employer provides the demand (jobs), and educators create the supply (skilled talent to fill the jobs). Just like a manufacturer works in partnership with suppliers as well as customers, the system of all stakeholders must work together in a continuous cycle of communication, adjustment, and development.

Let's further examine the Demand side of this process. What is the pull? What do local employers need in terms of talent? We have data to show current and projected job demand, which is shown on the following pages. However, we have anecdotal evidence that "soft skills" are the most important need for local employers. These are skills that cut across every industry and are essential for success in any job. They include *Teamwork, Effective Communication, Accountability,* and more.

Talent is the supply that fills the current and projected demand.

Talent: Learn about skill needs, train, and access jobs

Employers create the "pull" of demand through the jobs they provide.

Education: Learn about skill needs and prepare talent

Employers: Accurately communicate current and projected skill needs

Many workforce development organizations have rejected the term "soft skills" since these skills are of such critical importance. Many are using the term "employability skills" or "essential skills." Further in this report, we switch to "integration skills" in order to capture the diversity of skill sets and the need for applying them in a cross-functional way.

Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, *Problem-Solving, Adaptability,* and *Resourcefulness* have risen to the top of the "soft skills" list. More and more workers must manage ever-changing and unanticipated challenges, such as:

• Trouble-shoot their own technology issues while working from home,

• Find their own professional development,

• Juggle ever-more complex work/life balance needs,

• Manage facility use in new ways, and

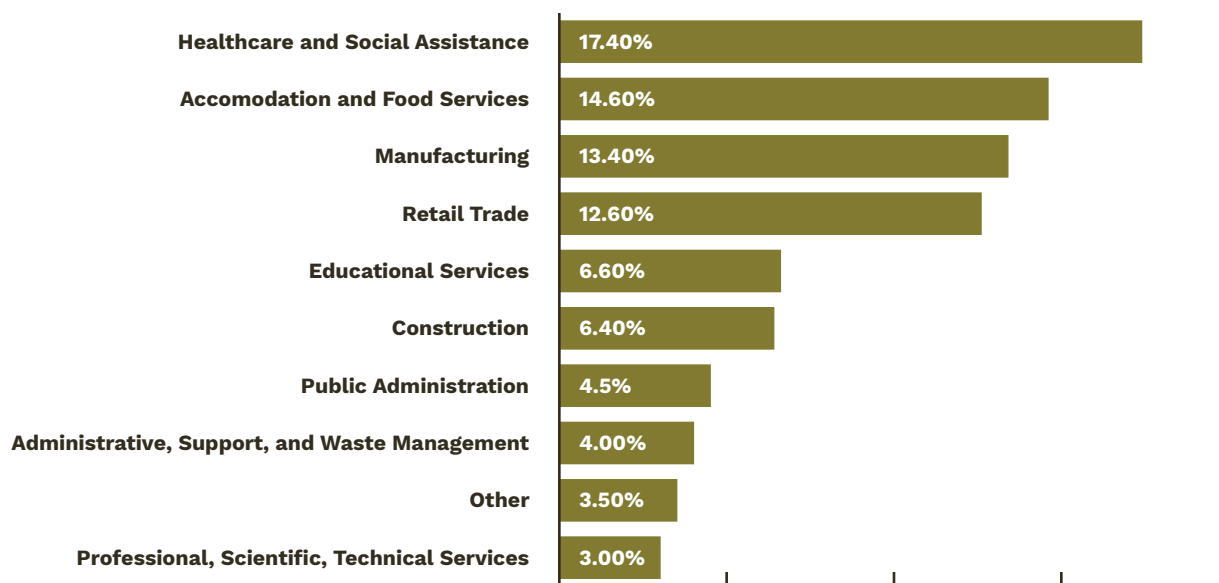• Find different methods of connecting with customers and colleagues.

This list is just a sample of the issues that our current workforce is facing, all of which require new skills that are not specific to any particular industry.

Demand Data

The following sets of data demonstrate current and projected job needs. This data shows us that...

• Healthcare and Social Assistance provides the largest volume of jobs of any single industry.

• The Accommodation and Food Service and Retail Trade industries comprise the largest proportion of jobs in the region. (These two industries are often viewed together because of their connection to tourism.) They will continue to have high demand due to some incremental growth but primarily because of high turnover.

• Other occupations are projected to grow, including those in healthcare, information technology, advanced manufacturing, construction, and finance.

% Jobs by Industry, 2018

Industry	%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	17.40%
Accomodation and Food Services	14.60%
Manufacturing	13.40%
Retail Trade	12.60%
Educational Services	6.60%
Construction	6.40%
Public Administration	4.5%
Administrative, Support, and Waste Management	4.00%
Other	3.50%
Professional, Scientific, Technical Services	3.00%

1Source: American Communities Survey, 2014 – 2018; Longitudinal Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau

Employment Projections
by Major Occupational Category, 2016-2026

Occupational Category	2016	2026	Employment Growth	
			Number	Percent
Total, All Occupations	135,185	142,775	7,590	5.6%
Management	7,805	8,270	465	6.0%
Business and Financial Operations	3,765	3,990	225	6.0%
Computer and Mathematical	1,035	1,090	55	5.3%
Architecture and Engineering	1,615	1,660	45	2.8%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	940	970	30	3.2%
Community and Social Service	2,115	2,375	260	12.3%
Legal	875	920	45	5.1%
Education, Training, and Library	6,045	6,435	390	6.5%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	2,120	2,135	15	0.7%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	8,920	9,975	1,055	11.8%
Healthcare Support	4,205	4,875	670	15.9%
Protective Service	2,320	2,305	-15	-0.6%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	13,285	14,330	1,045	7.9%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	6,125	6,640	515	8.4%
Personal Care and Service	5,635	6,505	870	15.4%
Sales and Related	15,410	15,750	340	2.2%
Office and Administrative Support	19,840	20,005	165	0.8%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	2,045	2,250	205	10.0%
Construction and Extraction	6,370	6,965	595	9.3%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	5,515	5,910	395	7.2%
Production	12,125	12,000	-125	-1.0%
Transportation and Material Moving	7,070	7,420	350	5.0%

Source: Region 2 Workforce Analysis Report, 2020; Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives (BLMISI), State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (DTMB)

The above information shows data based on broad occupational categories, and so is intended as an overview of general trends. However, more granular data is available through the Northwest Michigan Career Outlooks, 2016 to 2026, which highlights high-demand, high-wage occupations and is attached to this report as Appendix A. This report indicates that it's not just tourism-related jobs that are needed in this region; many jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage, often with benefits, are projected to grow substantially.

This includes, as an example, the following

Architects	Carpenters
Surveyors	IT Analysts, Admin, Support
Software Developers	Medical Technologists
Web Developers	Healthcare Managers
Engineers	Account and Auditors
Technicians	Financial Managers
Machine Programmers	Loan Officers
Register Nurses	

Supply Data

The following sets of data show information about our local workforce. This data shows us that...
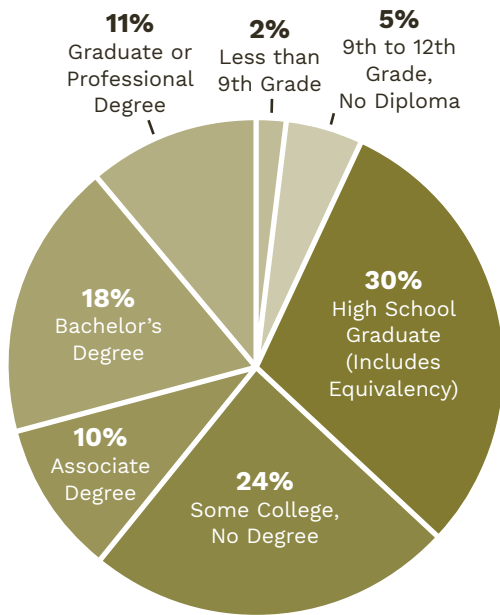
- Unemployment rates spiked in April but have been steadily declining ever since.

- Approximately 24% of the region's workforce have "Some College, No Degree" as their highest level of education; more work should be done to determine actual credentials held by the workforce, regardless of whether a college degree is attained.
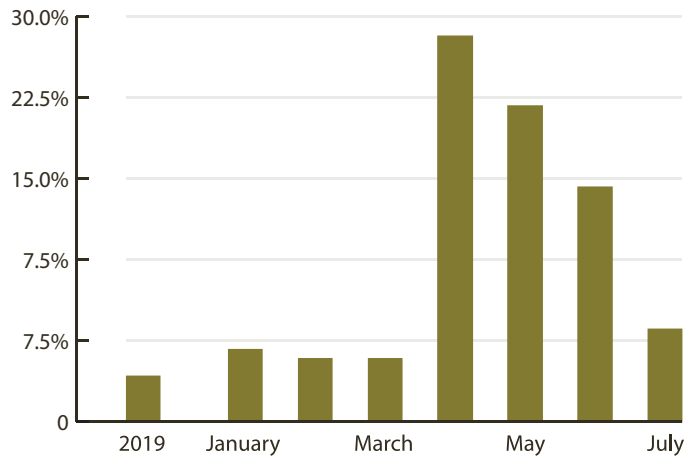
Source: *Employment and Unemployment Statistics - LAUS, BLMISI DTMB*

- The working-age population has declined in the past five years. Since the number of those under the age of 19 has also declined, we can anticipate that this trend will continue in the future. At the same time, retirement and near-retirement age groups have increased so significantly that the overall population has increased.

The year 2020 has shown the first significant spike in unemployment since the great recession, due to responses to the COVID pandemic. The unemployment rate for all of 2019 was 4.1% for the region, with January through March showing similar numbers. The spike in April – the height of business shut-downs – registered at 27.4%. Fortunately, this number has been steadily declining ever since.

11%
Graduate or Professional Degree

2%
Less than 9th Grade

5%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma

18%
Bachelor's Degree

30%
High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)

10%
Associate Degree

24%
Some College, No Degree

Approximately 60% of the population has less than an Associate's Degree. While that may fit with the overall distribution of projected job demand by educational attainment, it is not sufficient for high-wage, high-demand jobs. In addition, the category "Some College, No Degree" does not accurately reflect the shorter-term credentials that may be held by local talent.

Since 2013, the population ages 35 to 54 has decreased significantly. At the same time, all population groups over the age of 55 has increased. The population under 19 years has decreased as well, indicating continued future decreases of working-age populations.
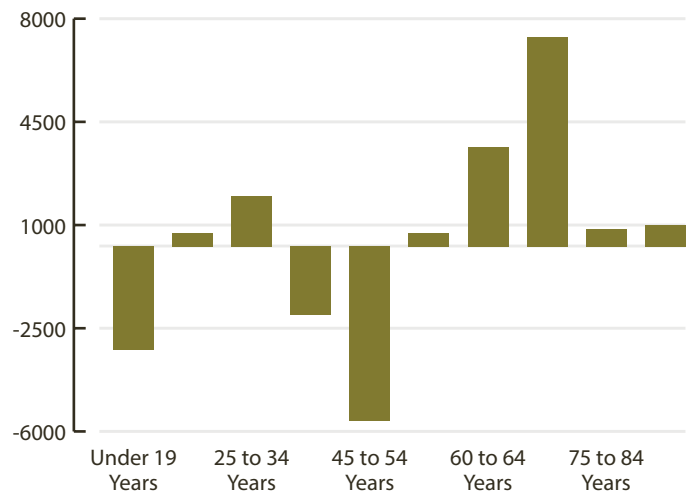
Purpose

The purpose of any regional plan is to provide a researched, vetted, and strategic framework for regional implementation. This plan is intended to be utilized by any stakeholder working in the realms of talent attraction, development, and retention, many of whom were involved in the process of brainstorming and prioritizing the strategies proposed here.

In order to provide a common goal across all stakeholders, we posit this purpose statement as the plan's overriding imperative:

Improve the Talent Capacity of the Region

In this case, the term "capacity" refers to both the number of people in the workforce the skill that they possess. We must attract, develop, and retain more workers, and they must have the skills that local employers need.

In addition to the above purpose statement, we also suggest that a primary principle should narrow the scope, as there are many facets of talent attraction, development, and retention.

Talent Advancement

Talent Advancement is a universal principle for all strategies related to Talent Attraction, Development, and Retention.


Attractions

Development

Retention
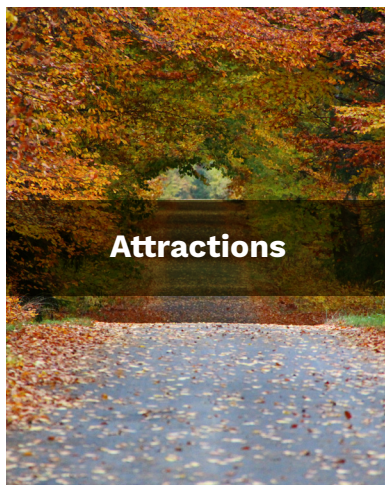
- **Attraction:** People want to move here. What's preventing them? *Opportunity* – awareness that it exists now and in the future. If people learned that they could advance their careers once they got here, it could be the final "push" they need.

- **Development:** Why do people enroll in training of any kind? They want to improve their prospects with improved skills, regardless of where they are in life.

- **Retention:** We have access to career opportunities that we never had before – you don't have to move to a big city to have a great career. You can live, play, and work in Northwest Michigan.

In working to achieve this purpose, we must know whether we are succeeding. While no existing data directly ties to any specific strategy in this plan, there are two data sets that can serve as an indicator of progress in our collective efforts. The region should watch these two indicators closely to ascertain the overall success of these strategies.

Credential Attainment: An increase in the number of credentials held by the local talent pool will occur if we are offering more modular trainings. This data is typically collected by the US Census Bureau in their yearly community survey, but does not identify short-term, industry-recognized credentials that fall between a high school diploma and an associate's degree, or any professional certificates. This poses a challenge for tracking success, since the strategy most closely related to this indicator focuses on those very short-term trainings. Therefore, the region should invest in a means of tracking short-term credentials.

Credential Attainment

Working Age Population

Working-age Population: An increase in the population that is of working age will occur if talent attraction and retention efforts are successful, with talent development activities serving as supporting strategies.

It should be noted that these two indicators are not reliant on talent advancement alone; they are also influenced by changes in the economy, availability of affordable housing and childcare, access to transportation, and much more. However, if the stakeholders working in talent advancement are doing their part, these two sets of data should see movement upward.
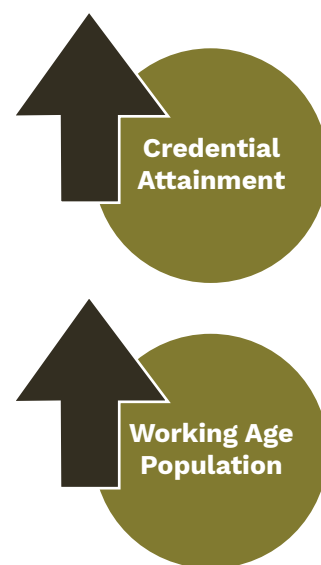
Regional Promotion

Regional Promotion consists of three strategies: *Virtual Work, High-Paying Jobs,* and *Entrepreneurship*. Each of these represents a facet of the region that should be promoted with targeted, focused messaging.

Promoting the region as a great place to live, work, and play has been attempted in various forms for many years, for both talent and business attraction. However, many of these efforts have been somewhat vague compared to what is proposed here. These activities have included promoting our many recreational opportunities, festivals, and community activities, as well as open jobs, schools, real estate, and more. All of this is important to promote, and provides a holistic reflection of the region. However, narrowing the scope of the promotion in order to deliver a targeted message is a more effective marketing approach.

The targeted message the region should adopt is that we are destination for virtual work and entrepreneurship – if you can work or start your business anywhere, why not here? Plus, we offer high-paying jobs for a skilled workforce.

Regional Promotion

Another cardinal rule in effective marketing is *repetition*. The more often an audience sees a message, in different venues and formats, the more likely they are to remember. Therefore, this strategy is not watered down by duplication – it works even if multiple entities do the same thing.

Virtual Work

Entrepreneurship

High-Paying Jobs

Strategy: Promote Virtual Work

During COVID-19, more people started working remotely than ever before. Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Communities Survey estimated that 8 million people worked from home as of 2018 (5% of the total workforce).[1] As of mid-2020, estimates show that **42% of the workforce** (Stanford University) is working remotely.

Many large companies have announced that significant proportions of their workers – some 100% — will work from home indefinitely or until at least 2021. Some companies are recognizable, such as Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft, and Google. Others aren't as well-known (Shopify, Coinbase, Upwork), but serve as a harbinger of the trend: companies of all sizes can rely on distributed, home-based teams to perform quality work.

Current State

Northwest Michigan has always been a great place to work remotely. If you can work from anywhere, why not work in a place that offers beautiful vistas, 4-season outdoor recreation, and small-town charm? Many local jobs can be done virtually as well. A recent estimate by Fourth Economy shows that 22.6% of jobs are able to be done remotely.[2]

One challenge to overcome in implementing this strategy is greater access to broadband, which is intermittent across the region, and especially lacking in rural areas. According to **Broadband Now**, coverage is highest in Grand Traverse County at 95.1% and lowest in Missaukee at 26.3%

(this may be due to large swaths of agricultural and public land). Connected Nation shows coverage across all of Michigan by download and upload speed; the highest measure (25mbps download and 3mbps upload) is largely unavailable in the Northwest region. However, most population centers (cities and small towns) have reliable broadband sufficient for remote work. Although usually lower in strength, free wifi hotspots are available in most towns and villages, as evidenced by the State of Michigan's **Free Wifi Map**.

Desired Future State

During COVID-19, more people started working remotely than ever before. Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Communities Survey estimated that 8 million people worked from home as of 2018 (5% of the total workforce). As of mid-2020, estimates show that 42% of the workforce (Stanford University) is working remotely.

How will promoting Virtual Work contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent from outside the area will recognize the opportunity to live in a place with high quality of life while working virtually.	Economic development and communities should work together to promote the entire region as an opportunity for virtual work.
Talent Retention: Talent from inside the region will choose to stay here rather than moving to a big city for good jobs.	Educational institutions, workforce development, and others can provide virtual work workshops, offering professional development to assist workers in making the transition to remote work and increase their skill set.
Talent Development: Talent will have access to professional learning opportunities through local education systems.	Various partners can provide connections opportunities for virtual workers.

[1] *American Communities Survey 2013-2018, Longitudinal Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau*

[2] *Northwest Michigan Regional Recovery and Reinvestment Report May 2020, Fourth Economy, based on occupational profiles from Bureau of Labor Statistics and the O*Net database.*

Strategy: Promote Entrepreneurship

For many people with limited resources, small business ownership appears to be out of reach. Renting an office or facility, purchasing equipment, and initial marketing costs add up quickly. These start-up financial needs are in addition to earning a living to pay bills, at least for a transition period. All of this results in too high a barrier to entry.

But the world of virtual work, along with effective support systems, is making entrepreneurship more accessible to more people. Service-based small businesses, such as consulting, bookkeeping, and computer programming, require little investment in equipment and can often be done from home or a low-cost shared workspace.

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Current State

As a proportion of the overall volume of establishments, sole proprietorships and small businesses (2 to 9 jobs) have remained fairly steady since 2005,[3] with minimal increases and decreases by county. The spirit of entrepreneurship is alive and well, with pitch competitions occurring periodically throughout the region, co-op and crowd-funded investment mechanisms gaining in popularity, and more angel and venture capital groups forming. In addition, support systems are starting to grow, with more business coaching and mentoring (SCORE, SBDC, and more) services available. In order to grow small business, we should leverage the spirit and supports by promoting them and featuring the region as a great place to be an entrepreneur.

Desired Future State

How will promoting Entrepreneurship contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent from other areas can find support and encouragement in their entrepreneurial endeavors in the region. If you can start your business anywhere, why not here?	Economic development should highlight entrepreneurship as a viable option for talent in their talent attraction efforts.
Talent Retention: Talent in the region can start their business without having to move to the big city.	Educational institutions should encourage and support small business ownership by teaching entrepreneurship skills in their existing classes. This should go beyond typical business classes – it should be integrated into programs that will likely lead to freelance work, such as visual arts, unmanned systems, renewable energy, and more.
Talent Development: Entrepreneurship is another step along the pathway that advances a person's career.	The region should dedicate resources to small business start-up support programs, such as incubators, SBDC, and shared workspaces.

[3] *Establishment Size - % Total Establishments, YourEconomy.org, 2005 to 2019*

Strategy: Promote High-Paying Jobs

The **United Way's ALICE project** (ALICE stands for Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) states that a family of four in the 10-county region must earn approximately $60,000 per year in order to cover basic household expenses like housing, childcare, medical costs, and transportation. However, our economy has a high proportion of service-related jobs, with relatively low wages.

This feeds a stigma associated with the region about the lack of high-paying, professional-level jobs. Certain areas within the region, such as Traverse City and Harbor Springs, are especially plagued by the dichotomous reputation of great wealth made possible by large numbers of service workers. Therefore, it is essential that we feature and promote the higher-paying jobs that the region does have, and support their continuous growth. This strategy has the added benefit of increasing awareness about high-wage, high-demand occupations for students and workers in the region, so they are at least knowledgeable about local opportunities.

Desired Future State

How will promoting high-paying jobs contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent from outside the region will have access to jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. They will start to recognize these opportunities in the region, rather than only seeing low-paying service jobs	When promoting the region or any community within it, highlight jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. Include many jobs so that prospective talent sees the variety and potential beyond the one position that could bring them here. This will help to overcome the perception that the only jobs we have are service-related, low-paying positions.
Talent Retention: Talent will recognize that they can stay here and still have a family-sustaining career.	
Talent Development: Talent will learn new skills and move up from lower-paying positions into higher-paying careers.	

[1] *American Communities Survey 2013-2018, Longitudinal Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau*

[2] *Northwest Michigan Regional Recovery and Reinvestment Report May 2020, Fourth Economy, based on occupational profiles from Bureau of Labor Statistics and the O*Net database.*

Modular Training

Modular Training consists of three strategies: *Micro-Credentials, Integration Skills,* and *Company-based Training*. Each of these is described in detail on the following pages. Together they fill a gap in the spectrum of talent development resources, attached here as Appendix B. While all other milestones in the educational spectrum are covered at some level in the region, there is a clear gap in the availability of short-term trainings that are focused on a specific skillset. This gap offers an opportunity to better support talent at all skill levels with programs that build skills in manageable timeframes, and that closely align with the needs of local businesses.

Micro-Credentials

Integration Skill

Company Based Training

Strategy: Micro-Credentials

Micro-Credentials consist of very short-term training, typically one or two classes, that provides the completer with proof of achievement. More than a typical professional development workshop, Micro-Credential programs are closer to a college course that focuses on a specific skillset rather than a broader academic subject. Yet, they are much more accessible than college courses – a person can avoid the admissions and enrollment process, take the class in a timeframe that fits with a busy lifestyle, and still have a credential to show current or future employers.

According to Digital Promise[4], Micro-Credentials verify competency for a set of skills needed by industry. They can be used to validate learning in short-term programs, offering proof that an individual can perform at a certain level. Unlike a certificate of participation, the recipient of a micro-credential must demonstrate mastery of the skill.

Current State

Larger companies in the region offer formal professional development programs for their employees, giving them opportunity to learn and grow in their industry. Some companies can hire trainers to teach new skills to a large enough group that it is cost-effective (See Company-based Training). Postsecondary institutions offer some modular, short-term programs, such as

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[4] **Digital Promise** an independent, bipartisan nonprofit, authorized by Congress in 2008 as the National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies through Section 802 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

one-year certificates. However, very little is offered locally for one- or two-class learning that results in a credential. This gap is reflected in the Talent Development Spectrum shown in Appendix B.

Local Highlight

Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) is developing micro-credentialing options within Computer Information Technology (CIT), Engineering Technology, and other programs. Their process involves bundling existing courses and utilizing already-approved curriculum. This speeds-up the lengthy process of creating something from scratch, but still maintains academic integrity. Examples include Fluid Power Basics with a certification in IFPS Connectors and Conductors and CAD Associate with certification in SolidWorks.

Jason Slade, the college's director of technical academic area, says "These micro-credentials are a win for the workforce as well as for the college. They are on- and off-ramps to degree programs, allowing each person to build their own educational pathway and improve their job prospects at the same time."

NMC's Parsons-Stulen campus, where many technology-based courses are held.

The college is in the process of developing micro-credentials in Python programming, geographic information systems, remote sensing, and electronics. They have established a partnership with Traverse City-based tech incubator 20Fathoms, to provide micro-credentials based on the coding classes offered there. These would give local talent a credit pathway to NMC in the areas of CIT developer, CyberSecurity, and Entrepreneurship.

Desired Future State

How will Micro-Credentials contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent looking at the area will see that opportunities to learn and grow are available and accessible in the region.	Build awareness among partners, employers, and the community about Micro-Credentials and encourage more of them.
Talent Retention: Existing employees who want to grow and advance can do so in a manageable way, without having to leave the area and/or commit to 2- or 4-year programs.	Educational institutions should partner with economic development, workforce development, and others to create and offer micro-credential courses.
Talent Development: Talent will be able to develop new skills in bite-sized pieces. Achieving a credential provides a sense of accomplishment and verification to show a current or potential employer.	

Strategy: Integration Skills

Ask any employer about their talent needs, and the first thing they will say is that they need someone who will learn what needs to be done, work hard, and be reliable. These talent needs have come to be known as "soft skills," as opposed to the "hard skills" that are specific to occupations (i.e. knowing QuickBooks for a bookkeeper or CNC programming for a machinist). The term "soft skills" is misleading though, because these skills are too important to be considered soft – they serve as an essential foundation for success in any type of job.

Prior to COVID-19, most people would agree that these "soft" or "foundational" skills consisted of Teamwork, Effective Communication, Critical Thinking, and Accountability, among others. In January 2020, Forbes published a list of "**5 Of The Most In-Demand Soft Skills Companies Are Looking For This Year.**" Their list included Creativity, Persuasion, Collaboration, Adaptability, and Emotional Intelligence. While these skills have always been important, it appears that the pandemic -- with its upheaval of all kinds of work -- has elevated the need for soft skills even more. With individuals working at home in record numbers, skills such as Resourcefulness and Problem-Solving are increasingly important.

As important as these skills are, they are only effective when applied along with hard skills as well as with each other – when they are integrated in a cross-functional manner. Accountability is necessary to be a good locksmith, but so are resourcefulness and manual dexterity.

Current State

Currently, Talent Advancement partners in Northwest Michigan recognize the importance of Integration Skills to workforce success. Education providers emphasize them in curriculum and graduation requirements; all partners hear directly from employers about how critical they are. However, proving that an individual has Integration Skills and can apply them on the job is very difficult. There is currently no collectively recognized means of verifying that an individual possesses those skills.

Desired Future State

How will training in Integration Skills contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent seeking to move here will have access to a credential that proves their ability to integrate soft and hard skills.	Create a list of well-defined Integration Skills and seek endorsement from regional partners via the Career & Education Advisory Council.
Talent Retention: Employers will see less turnover; talent is more likely to retain jobs and stay with a local employer. **Talent Development:** Talent will be able to develop new skills in bite-sized pieces. Achieving a credential provides a sense of accomplishment and verification to show a current or potential employer.	Develop an Integration Skills Certification program that verifies skill attainment and endorses an individual's mastery.

Strategy: Company-based Training

In order to increase the skills of the local workforce, companies should engage educational institutions to offer training opportunities. This is a win-win, allowing workers to obtain new skills and employers to grow their own talent.

Examples of company-based trainings range from a one-day workshop on customer service to weeks-long trainings on operating new equipment. Another type of company-based training is Apprenticeship, which consists of both formal instruction and on-the-job time with a mentor. Apprenticeships have evolved over the past few decades beyond the traditional union-based training, and applies to more than just the trades. Most occupations are "apprentice-able," including Certified Nurse Aide, Software Developer, Beekeeper, and much more.

Regardless of the type of training, companies that offer their employees an opportunity to grow tend to have a stronger positive culture. Investing in talent offers many rewards in terms of productivity and profitability, including improved employee retention. In a recent **LinkedIn Survey**, 68% of employees said they prefer to learn at work, and 94% said they would stay longer at a company if it invested in their career.[5]

Current State

Larger companies in the region offer formal professional development programs for their employees, giving them opportunity to learn and grow in their industry. Some companies can hire trainers to teach new skills to a large enough group that it is cost-effective (See Company-based Training). Postsecondary institutions offer some modular, short-term programs, such as one-year certificates. However, very little is offered locally for one- or two-class learning that results in a credential. This gap is reflected in the Talent Development Spectrum shown in Appendix B.

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[3] *Establishment Size - % Total Establishments, YourEconomy.org, 2005 to 2019*

Local Highlight

West Shore Community College (WSCC) has overcome the challenge of requiring minimum numbers for a class – they can train one employee at a time. Their long-standing Employer Relationships led to the development of an Open Entry / Open Exit model that combines online learning with hands-on instruction. "This program was created to meet the immediate training needs that many of our local companies desire," says Crystal Young, director of the **WSCC Business Opportunity Center**. "It is flexible and responsive, so an employee can be hired one day and enroll in the program the next."

WSCC stocked a facility at their campus with equipment that local companies use, funded by a grant and supported by the companies.

The **OE/OE program offers classes** in Production Technician, Mechatronics, and Supply Chain Logistics, among others. "About 12 different local companies regularly send their new hires through some or all of the courses in a particular program, with many others using it as-needed" says Young. The model provides both non-credit and credit courses, many of which can be used toward a certificate or degree.

Desired Future State

How will Company-based Trainings contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: A critical mass of companies that are great to work for because they offer ongoing learning is appealing to talent from outside the area.	Educational institutions should leverage their improved employer relationships (see **Employer/ Education Relationships**) to develop customized, flexible trainings to meet the needs of local companies.
Talent Retention: Talent will be more likely to stay with a company, and thus stay in the region, if given the opportunity to learn and grow.	Companies should take advantage of micro-credentialing programs to offer their employees short-term learning opportunities that result in a badge, certificate, or other type of portable credential.
Talent Development: Talent will learn new skills so they can grow in their field.	Smaller companies should work together; if multiple companies each send one or two employees to training, they can collectively fill a class.

Employer Connections

Employer Connections consists of two strategies: *Employer/Education Relationships* and *Student Experiences*. Each of these is described in detail on the following pages.

While the strategies in this report are not presented in any particular order, the aspect of Employer/Education Relationships should be considered a priority. It is the pre-cursor to many others, including Micro-Credentials, Company-based Trainings, and Employer-based Student Experiences. By developing and maintaining robust relationships with employers, the education sector can thoroughly understand their needs. This will lead to programming that is much more responsive, ensuring that students are learning the right skills and are connected to employers in the region.

Employer / Education Relationships

Employer-based Student Experiences

Strategy: Employer/Education Relationships

In order for education and training programs to adequately prepare talent for their chosen occupation, teachers, counselors, administrators, and others must have a comprehensive understanding of employer needs. An education institution's relationship with local industry is a critical factor in whether programs are successful.[6]

The benefits of strong, sustained relationships between employers and education are many. They pave the way for student experiences, such as internships and co-ops. They offer teachers and learners alike a view to real-world application of academic concepts. In some cases, project-based learning occurs, allowing students to help a company solve a real problem and improve its ability to operate. Along the way, students are connected to local companies, where they see opportunity for a career in the region.

In addition, innovative frameworks can be developed or emerge from stronger employer relationships. The learning that occurs in both directions can reveal a need for a Micro-Credentialing course, a customized training program, or a new certificate or degree.

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[6] *A **study of workforce programs** in California shows that connections with industry partners is one of four characteristics that successful programs had in common. This is one of many studies providing evidence of this critical factor.*

Current State

Most education institutions use advisory groups to provide knowledge on current practices and skill needs. However, those groups meet once or twice per year, which doesn't keep pace with the constant change in most industries. In addition, there can be a "language" barrier – employers don't speak in curriculum terminology, putting the onus on instructors to translate employer needs into classroom activity.

Economic development and workforce development entities maintain strong employer relationships in order to understand their needs. This can be of great help to education, but doesn't replace a direct connection to local employers who are seeking trained completers of their programs.

Desired Future State

How will Employer/Education Relationships contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent looking to move to the area will see a well-networked system of training programs that are connected to local employers.	Wherever possible, educational entities should commit resources to improving relationships with employers, such as hiring navigators based on the Brookings Institution report (see below).
Talent Retention: Talent will be connected to local companies prior to completion.	Develop frameworks that improve connections between teachers, counselors, administrators and others with local employers. This may include increasing the frequency of advisory group meetings, offering teacher externships, and increasing school leadership involvement in employer-based groups (chambers, industry associations, etc.).
Talent Development: Talent will learn in a way that is better connected to real-world application.	

The Brookings Institution created a "**Toolkit for successful community college-employer relationships**." This report recommends that community colleges establish high-level Navigators who serve as liaisons between the college and local industry. This navigator can be the translator to cross the language barrier, as well as steward relationships and facilitate connections all year long. While dedicated positions may be a financial hardship for local colleges or other training institutions (i.e. Career and Technical Education), the premise of committing resources to develop and maintain relationships still applies.

Local Highlight

Baker College of Cadillac has a long history of prioritizing employer engagement. It is built-in to the fabric of the institution, and modeled from the top: Campus President Kelly Smith works diligently with local companies and spreads the message to the entire community that the college is willing and able to partner. This creates a college culture that recognizes the need to engage with local companies and the resulting benefits. Standard practices across the college range from requiring all students to complete internships to connecting faculty with local companies to partnering on apprenticeship programs such as **MAT2**.

Mark Lagerwey (left), Associate Director of Business Development and Katelyn Richard, Employer Relations Specialist

It's not easy, though, to develop and maintain relationships with employers that are this productive. "Cultivating relationships takes time, resources, and intentional connection. That's why we dedicate staff to stewarding those relationships, like Mark Lagerwey and Katelyn Richard" says Smith.

Lagerwey and Richard (pictured) have a charge from Smith: to be good listeners and always seek innovative ways to support employer needs. Their efforts are reminiscent of a philanthropic foundation's stewardship of donors: "I find that continuous touch back to our partners and employer base is key in letting them know we genuinely care about their needs, their workforce and them as an organization and individual," says Richard.

Ultimately, the purpose of employer engagement is to ensure that curriculum is aligned with employer needs. But employer relationships such as those held by Baker College of Cadillac provide so much more; they turn the college into a key instrument of employer success with improved responsiveness, customization, and most importantly, critical opportunities for students to enhance their learning and connect with local companies.

Strategy: Employer-based Student Experiences

While the Employer/Education Relationships strategy in this plan is the forerunner to this one, we have called out this aspect of it to stand alone as its own strategy. The benefits of student experiences that are connected to local employers are significant for Talent Advancement across the region. They offer real-world learning of applicable skills, enhanced awareness of career options, and a direct line to employment with local companies.

Studies abound showing the importance of this type of experience for career success. Internships in particular are believed to improve an individual's prospects, in part due to the mentoring and networking that occurs. However, any experience that places a student in a work situation, directly applying their academic knowledge, provides an opportunity for learning that cannot be replicated elsewhere. In addition, the employer sees a student's ability and gauges their fit with company culture prior to offering employment.

Current State

There is overwhelming interest and support among stakeholders in the region for increasing career awareness among students; there are many efforts occurring around career exploration. However, career awareness is only the starting point – there must be intentional efforts to not only expose students to careers, but to directly connect them with local employers. This can be done through a variety of experiences, such as project-based learning, co-ops, and internships. These same efforts can support talent attraction through internships that bring in students from universities outside the area.

One barrier that prevents more student experiences has been identified as lack of clarity for employers – what role do they play? What are the guidelines for projects, internships, co-ops? How do they get involved in the first place? These questions are being explored by a collaboration of entities focused on STEM-based education, with a goal of publishing a framework that guides various levels of employer engagement.

Local Highlight

Career and Technical Education (CTE) offers hands-on learning in demand occupations for high-school students. Across the region, CTE programs are closely linked to local businesses who recognize the need to get involved in education. A particularly innovative approach is occurring through the Char-Em Intermediate School District (Char-Em ISD), with their utility lineworker program.

Called Energy Fundamentals, the course is offered at Boyne City High School and is open to any student in the Char-Em ISD district. It is possible only through the generous partnership of Great Lakes Energy, Consumers Energy, and DTE. Unlike most CTE programs which offer training at a career-tech center or other well-equipped classroom, Energy Fundamentals combines classroom instruction with learning on-site at the Great Lakes Energy headquarters in Boyne City. In addition, the staff members at Great Lakes Energy serve as the vocational instructors for the program.

This close connection between the local business and the educational program offers students an experience that is truly employer-based. The companies involved have invested significant resources, knowing that this will provide a pipeline for their future workforce. Students receive a richer education that develops skills necessary for future employment.

Desired Future State

How will Employer-based Student Experiences contribute to Talent Advancement?	Recommendations:
Talent Attraction: Talent from outside the area will connect with local employers through internships; families looking to move to the area see a well-networked education system providing career opportunity for their children.	Increase opportunities for student experiences that connect them to local employers.
Talent Retention: Students will build long-term, sustainable relationships with local employers that result in jobs once they graduate.	Share existing frameworks that guide those experiences and give employers clarity in their role, such as internship toolkits; build on them to build improved communication between schools and employers.
Talent Development: Talent will learn through real-world experiences and applications due to company-based projects, internships, etc.	

Appendix A:
High-Demand Occupations Through 2026

High School Diploma or Equivalent and Short-Term Training			
Occupation (Job Title)	Annual Openings	Growth %	Wage Range
Amusement and Recreation Attendants	120	17.2	$10 – $13
Construction Laborers 🍃	165	12.4	$13 – $19
Constr. Trades and Excavation Workers, Supervisors 🍃 GP	65	9.2	$22 – $34
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other AG, Managers 🍃	140	2.7	$27 – $43 *
Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aqua. Animals	95	22.8	$10 – $13 *
Food Prep. and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	660	14.5	$10 – $11
Food Prep, and Serving Workers, Supervisors	155	7.3	$13 – $19
Helpers—Production Workers	6,90	21.3	$12 – $14
Home Health Aides	100	37.6	$10 – $14
Interviewers, Except Eligibility and Loan	45	18.8	$12 – $17
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Housekeepers	220	7.6	$11 – $17
Land, Lawn, and Grounds Workers, Supervisors	35	10.6	$17 – $28
Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers	290	10.8	$12 – $18
Light Truck or Delivery Services Drivers	85	8.1	$13 – $24
Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers, Supervisors 🍃	40	8.1	$23 – $39
Personal Carie Aides	300	29.8	$10 – $13
Production and Operating Workers, Supervisors 🍃	75	5.8	$19 – $33
Receptionists and Information Clerks	155	9.2	$12 – $17
Retail Sales Workers, Supervisors	185	3.9	$16 – $28
Retail Salespersons	780	3.8	$10 – $14

Appendix A:
High-Demand, High Wage Occupations Through 2026

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathmatics (STEM)			
Occupation (Job Title)	Annual Openings	Growth %	Wage Range
Architectural and Engineering Managers	5	0.0	$45 – $69
Civil Engineers	10	-3.7	$36 – $88
Computer and Information Systems Managers	10	5.3	$38 – $55
Computer Network Support Specialists **GP**	5	5.9	$15 – $28
Computer Systems Analysts	5	8.3	$28 – $42
Computer User Support Specialists	25	3.4	$18 – $28
Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technicians 🌿 **GP**	5	0.0	$29 – $37
Electrical Engineers 🌿	5	12.5	$34 – $48
Environ. Scientists and Specialists, Including Health 🌿	10	0.0	$26 – $36
Forest and Conservation Technicians 🌿	10	0.0	$16 – $23
Industrial Engineering Technicians 🌿 **GP**	5	12.5	$18 – $24
Industrial Engineers 🌿	25	12.3	$28 – $40
Landscape Architects 🌿	5	0.0	$37 – $100+
Mechanical Engineers 🌿	20	5.4	$30 – $44
Network and Computer Systems Administrators	10	0.0	$27 – $38
Sales Reps., Technical and Scientific Products 🌿	5	0.0	$20 – $34
Software Developers, Applications	15	32.0	$23 – $47
Surveying and Mapping Technicians	10	-4.8	$17 – $28
Web Developers **GP**	5	0.0	$18 – $34
Zoologists and Wildlife Biologists 🌿	5	0.0	$26 – $37

Appendix A:
High-Demand, High-Wage Occupations Through 2026

Post Secondary Certificate or Moderate-Term Training			
Occupation (Job Title)	**Annual Openings**	**Growth %**	**Wage Range**
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics 🍃 GP	80	6.9	$13 – $24
Billing and Posting Clerks	50	12.8	$15 – $19
Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers 🍃	20	16.7	$16 – $21
Computer User Support Specialists GP	25	3.4	$18 – $28
Dental Assistants	60	13.2	$16 – $19
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers 🍃	200	7.6	$18 – $24
Insurance Sales Agents	45	10.5	$15 – $40
Logging Equipment Operators	15	10.0	$16 – $19
Massage Therapists GP	20	16.7	$16 – $19
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians GP	10	8.6	$15 – $25
Mixing and Blending Machine Operators 🍃	30	10.0	$17 – $29
Operating Engineers 🍃 GP	45	10.1	$17 – $24
Packaging and Filling Machine Operators	90	7.9	$12 – $22
Paving, Surfacing, and Tamping Equip. Operators	15	8.3	$18 – $23
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	40	2.7	$20 – $29
Real Estate Sales Agents	30	6.8	$17 – $31
Sales Reps., Except Tech. and Scientific Products	130	5.4	$17 – $37
Separating and Filtering Machine Operators 🍃	10	21.4	$16 – $28
Surgical Technologists GP	10	7.1	$17 – $24
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers 🍃 GP	45	5.1	$15 – $24

Appendix A:
High-Demand, High-Wage Occupations Through 2026

Associate Degree/Long-Term Training/Apprenticeships			
Occupation (Job Title)	**Annual Openings**	**Growth %**	**Wage Range**
Automotive Body and Related Repairers **GP**	20	9.1	$17 – $29
Brickmasons and Blockmasons **GP**	20	13.9	$19 – $26
Bus and Truck Mech. and Diesel Engine Specialists 🌿 **GP**	30	8.9	$17 – $23
Carpenters 🌿 **GP**	130	6.7	$15 – $24
Dental Hygienists	20	14.6	$28 – $36
Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers 🌿 **GP**	20	-0.9	$33 – $41
Electricians 🌿 **GP**	60	15.0	$18 – $28
Farm Equipment Mechanics and Service Technicians	10	10.7	$16 – $22
HVAC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers 🌿 **GP**	30	20.3	$19 – $25
Industrial Machinery Mechanics 🌿 **GP**	50	8.5	$18 – $25
Machinists 🌿 **GP**	70	3.2	$16 – $24
Maintenance Workers, Machinery **GP**	10	15.6	$18 – $26
Mobile Heavy Equip. Mechanics, Except Engines **GP**	10	11.7	$17 – $23
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	10	10.8	$19 – $24
Physical Therapist Assistants **GP**	20	21.6	$21 – $29
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	30	19.1	$19 – $30
Preschool Teachers	20	11.7	$15 – $21
Radiologic Technologists **GP**	10	6.0	$23 – $33
Respiratory Therapists **GP**	10	24.2	$24 – $30
Tile and Marble Setters	10	14.1	$17 – $28 *

Appendix A:
High-Demand, High-Wage Occupations Through 2026

Bachelor's Degree or Higher			
Occupation (Job Title)	Annual Openings	Growth %	Wage Range
Accountants and Auditors	80	6.5	$21 – $33
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	50	11.1	$22 – $29
Construction Managers 🍃	20	8.4	$32 – $68
Education Administrators, Elementary and Secondary	30	6.4	$38 – $52
Educational, Guidance, and School Counselors	20	10.2	$23 – $34
Elementary School Teachers	90	5.6	$19 – $34
Financial Managers	20	17.4	$32 – $58
General and Operations Managers 🍃	160	6.9	$26 – $53
Healthcare Social Workers	30	12.9	$22 – $29
Industrial Engineers 🍃	20	13.4	$28 – $40
Loan Officers	20	9.5	$20 – $44
Medical and Health Services Managers	30	15.4	$29 – $56
Middle School Teachers	40	6.1	$23 – $38
Nurse Anesthetists	10	13.9	$88 – $100+
Personal Financial Advisors 🍃	10	12.1	$29 – $78
Physical Therapists	20	25.4	$35 – $47
Physician Assistants	10	34.0	$43 – $59
Registered Nurses	200	12.2	$27 – $36
Secondary School Teachers	60	6.0	$21 – $35
Social and Community Service Managers	20	11.9	$30 – $41

Regional wage data unavailable; Statewide wage data shown.

Note: These lists include occupations that show a favorable mix of projected long-term job growth, projected annual job openings, and median wages. They do not necessarily reflect current hiring demand. Hourly wage range represents the 25th to 75th percentiles.
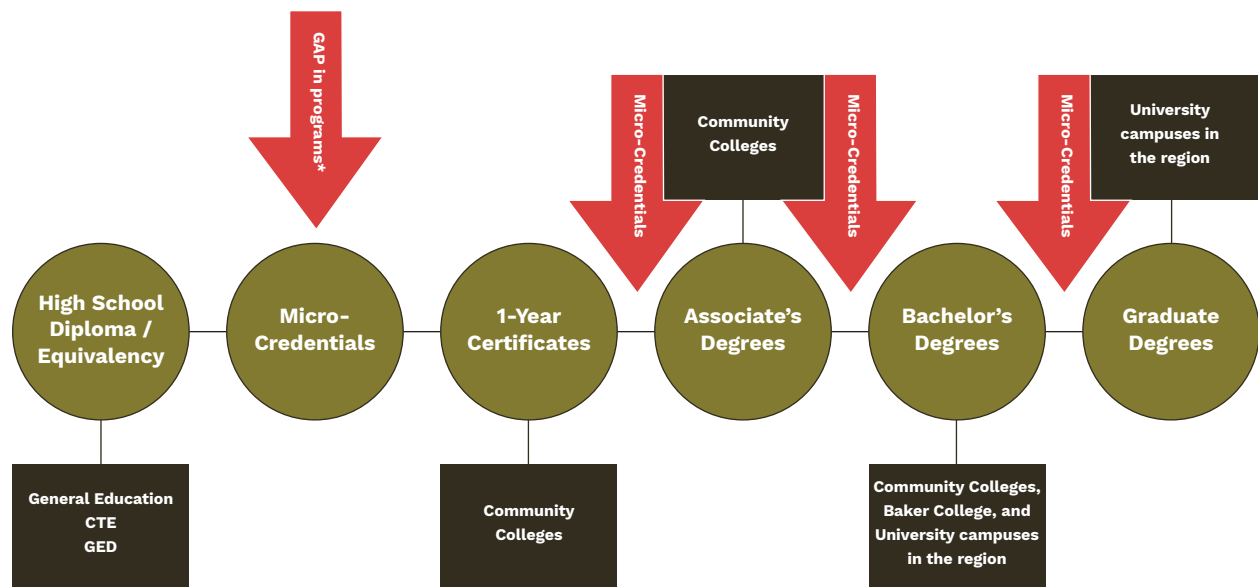
🍃 *Green Jobs*

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Information Courtesy of the State of Michigan **www.michigan.gov/LMI**

Appendix B:
Talent Development Spectrum in Northwest Michigan

On a spectrum of credential attainment, Micro-Credentials are often thought to fall between high school and 1-year certificates. However, they can also be extremely useful between other credentials such as professional certifications for specializations.

GAP in programs

High School Diploma / Equivalency

General Education
CTE
GED

Micro-Credentials

1-Year Certificates

Community Colleges

Micro-Credentials

Associate's Degrees

Community Colleges

Micro-Credentials

Bachelor's Degrees

Community Colleges, Baker College, and University campuses in the region

Micro-Credentials

Graduate Degrees

University campuses in the region

* Micro-Credentials are offered sporadically across the region by various entities, such as The-Center (Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center). But they are not nearly as accessible or at the volume we need.

Appendix C:
Talent Resources in Northwest Michigan

Postsecondary

College	Academic Programs	Business & Industry	Other
North Central Michigan College (Emmet, Charlevoix)	**Program Pathways**	**Corporate & Community Education**	**Mobile Fabrication Lab**
Northwestern Michigan College (Leelanau, Benzie, Antrim, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska)	**Degrees and Certificates**	**Professional and Workforce Development**	**University Center** (Bachelors and Masters)
Baker College of Cadillac (Wexford, Missaukee)	**Baker College of Cadillac**	Call Tom Nathe or Mark Lagerwey	**MAT2**
West Shore Community College (Manistee)	**Degree programs**	**Business and Community Education**	**Open Entry / Open Exit**

Career and Technical Education

- **Char-Em Intermediate School District** (Charlevoix, Emmet)

- **Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District Career-Tech Center** (Leelanau, Benzie, Antrim, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska)

- **Wexford-Missaukee Intermediate School District Career Technical Center** (Wexford, MIssaukee)

Regional

- **The Center** (Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center)

Appendix C:
Talent Resources in Northwest Michigan

College	Academic Programs	Other
Antrim	Program Pathways	**Manufacturing Technology program at NMC**
Benzie	Healthcare and Social Assistance	**TBAISD Allied Health occupational program at the Career Tech Center**
Charlevoix	Manufacturing	**NCMC Fab Lab**
Emmet	Healthcare and Social Assistance	**CharEm ISD Healthcare Occupations CTE program**
Grand Traverse	Healthcare and Social Assistance	**Nursing program at NMC**
Kalkaska	Healthcare and Social Assistance	**Paramedic program at NMC**
Leelanau	Construction	**Construction Technology program at NMC**
Manistee	Healthcare and Social Assistance	**Medical Assistant program at WSCC**
Missaukee	Manufacturing	**The Center** (Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center) for company-based trainings
Wexford	Manufacturing	**Michigan Advanced Technician Training (MAT2) at Baker College of Cadillac**

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