

West Michigan Strategic Alliance

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Focus: The West Michigan Strategic Alliance serves as a catalyst for regional collaboration in order to make West Michigan a better place to live, learn, work and play. *WIRED West Michigan which operates within the Alliance has a Goal:* to develop and manage an “innovations lab” designed to spawn a wide range of innovations in our regional economic development, workforce development and educational systems.

Geographic Area Served: West Michigan Alliance serves in seven counties. They are: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo and Ottawa counties.

Participant Age Level:

Funding Sources: The Alliance began in June 2000 and has worked to bring together partners throughout the region. These partners brought together the funding essential to do the work of the alliance. In 2006 a first round \$15 million dollar WIRED grant was secured and has been merged into the operation of the alliance. Phillip Rios, has been the director of the WIRED initiative. They are located at 10 Straight Avenue SW, Grand Rapids, MI49504. Their phone number is 616.331.6967 and the WIRED office e-mail is admin@wiredwestmi.org The three-year, \$15 million West Michigan WIRED grant is funding several regional initiatives and programs – called Innovations – that will help the West Michigan region overcome many of its workforce, education and economic challenges.

Key Services Abstract: Industries that are targeted are: Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Life Sciences, and Entrepreneurship

The Guiding Principles that guides the WIRED initiative are:

Innovation

- Invest in genuine innovations that deliver performance improvements at reduced costs
- Compress cycle times
- Create customer pull

International

- Target performance outcomes against global benchmarks and global value chains
- Create global awareness at every level of the system
- Source from the best in the world

Integration

- Create seamless integration between the K16 education system; workforce development and training; economic development; and enterprise development
- Integrate work and learning

***WIRED SubGoals and Strategies for the West Michigan Entrepreneurial League System
Stimulate entrepreneurship and new business creation in key sectors of the innovation economy.***

Enterprise Development

- Global School Model
- Accelerated Engineering Program
- Manufacturing Skill Development Coop
- Performance Based Credentialing Using WorkKeys
- Manufacturing Skills Standards
- Health Care RSA
- TriSector - Workforce Development (SOURCE)

Restructure key elements of our workforce development and education systems for emerging, existing and transitional workers.

Workforce System Transformations

- Innovation Curriculum
- Industrial Design Council
- Innovation Forum
- Intellectual Property Commercialization

Catalyze, support and sustain strategies to support innovation in our regional economy.

Innovation

- Emerging Sector Skill Analysis
- Regional Supply Chain Evolution analysis
- Knowledge Workers & Economic Development

Better understand the structure of regional employment clusters and the emerging skill requirements for the innovation economy.

Summary of Key Benefits and Results: The Result that the Alliance is seeking is - to compete and win in the “innovation economy”.

Focus has been on implement the Entrepreneurial League System® (ELS) to create a system that consistently supports the development of entrepreneurs from early stages of business development through business growth. (Collaborative Strategies). This work has created a more entrepreneurial friendly region.

Lessons Learned: Partners are key in advancing the broad initiatives in a region. West Michigan’s partnership members represent both sectoral and geographic diversity. They include West Michigan Strategic Alliance; Grand Valley State University; Grand Rapids Community College; The Right Place, Inc.; Lakeshore Advantage; Newaygo County Economic Development Office; Muskegon/Oceana County Consortium; Ionia County Economic Alliance; Delta Strategy; New Urban Learning; Work Design Collaborative, LLC; W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment & Research; Metrics Reporting; Collaborative Strategies LLC; IRN; Michigan Small Business & Technology Development Center; Alliance for Health; the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL); Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN); Best Michigan; Lambert, Edwards & Associates; Strategic Communication Group and 2GTech.

In the 8 county West Michigan area there are 96,701 firms registered to do business of that number 79,711 or 82% of the firms have no employees. The entrepreneur is the key to the success of the economy of the West Michigan area.

The key to a region's economic success is its entrepreneurial capital. We are not referring to financial capital, but to human capital. The most common mistake communities make is to focus on the results of the entrepreneurial process – the enterprise and its assets, and to ignore its source – the individuals who generate that wealth.

The pipeline of entrepreneurs in a region reflects a continuous flow of entrepreneurs and enterprises over time. Each communities “Pipeline of Entrepreneurs and Enterprises is different. That is why in order to get a true picture of the regions pipeline” – researchers must aggregate and map the variety of local pipelines to make sure that the whole is (and can be) representative of the parts.

We must acknowledge that to compete successfully in the global economy of the 21st century requires regions to have an enterprise development system, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This is something that West Michigan needs to create.

The entrepreneur and the enterprise are not one and the same, and the lack of attention to the entrepreneur, as distinct from the business, has become a source of failure. Service providers can provide numerous stories where the proper assistance was delivered but it had no impact on the business at all because (as is commonly recognized after the fact) the entrepreneur was either unwilling or unable to take the necessary actions to grow the business.

By itself, there is no guarantee that the natural movement of the pipeline (i.e., the current startup, growth and failure rates) is in accordance with the needs and strategies of the region.

The critical determinant of a community's economic vitality is the quantity and quality of its entrepreneurs and how well they are matched to the market opportunities they pursue. Communities can and must do something to improve their supply of entrepreneurs. We methodically cultivate many other kinds of talent, why not entrepreneurs?

Most of the above lessons learned come from a Study of Feasibility of and Requirements for Implementing an Entrepreneurial League System® in West Michigan, prepared By: Gregg A. Lichtenstein, Ph.D President Collaborative Strategies, LLC