



## **Press Release** **For Immediate Release**

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### **West Michigan Prosperity Alliance Announces Funding For Projects of Regional Economic Importance**

The West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA) is pleased to announce funding in the amount of \$230,250 for five projects of Significant Regional Economic Importance. The WMPA was formed in January 2014 as part of Governor Snyder's Regional Prosperity Initiative. The Alliance serves a 13 county region in West Michigan. It is one of the largest regions in the state with 130 miles of Lake Michigan Shoreline, over 90 school systems, 13 colleges and universities, 431 units of government, and a geography roughly the size of New Jersey. The population exceeds 1.5 million residents. Over 10,000 employers create \$5.7 billion in economic output.

The thirty-one person Steering Committee includes representatives of Work Force, Economic Development, Higher Education, Adult Education, Transportation and Regional Planning, Business and the area Foundations. All geographic areas are represented.

Through a series of regional meetings, the WMPA developed a Regional Prosperity Plan and a series of criteria to evaluate projects of "Significant Regional Economic Importance". At the meeting last March at the Governor's Economic Summit in Grand Rapids, 180 regional representative came together and established the project criteria. The five criteria are:

- Long term impact and sustainability
- Regional Impact
- Provide Employment Opportunities
- Recognize Regional Strengths and Challenges
- Promotes Public/Private Partnerships

Shortly thereafter, notifications of the project criteria and invitations to nominate projects were sent to over 3,000 individuals and organizations in the region. Thirty-one projects were nominated.

Last October, over 120 representatives from throughout the region gathered to evaluate and vote on the nominated projects. Six were selected as "Projects of Significant Regional Economic Importance". Those 6 projects and the amount of recent funding are:

**Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub** - A group of regional public and private community leaders are working together to further the development of the Muskegon Port as a regional logistic hub and an economic asset to the region. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund both an infrastructure analysis of port assets and an organizational structure analysis of port governance structures. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

**WMPA Grant \$31,250**      Private Donations \$31,250      EDA Grant \$62,500      Total \$125,000

**Protecting Lake Michigan Water Quality through Establishment of a Dedicated Revenue Source for Watershed Management** – Local watershed organizations will establish a West Michigan Regional Watershed Collaborative. The collaborative will develop a regional water quality plan and a program to generate sustainable financial resources to protect the water quality of Lake Michigan. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund the establishment of the collaborative and a consultant to assist with identifying potential sustainable funding models. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

**WMPA Grant \$89,000**      Private Donations \$15,000      Total \$104,000

**Connected Community Engagement Program, Technology Action Planning** – Connect Michigan, a non-profit entity that helps interested communities identify their technology needs and opportunities, will complete Technology Action Plans to address local broadband and technology issues. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund the creation of the Technology Action Plans in the region's counties. The WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

**WMPA Grant \$40,000**      Other Funding \$90,000      Total \$130,000

**Michigan Work Ready Communities** - The Michigan Work Ready Communities (MiWRC) initiative assists employers to find work-ready individuals. MiWRC focuses on enhancing fundamental credentials of young people who are ready to enter the workforce, as well as adults who have two years or less in a post-secondary education. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund a marketing and public relations campaign to increase employer engagement in the MiWRC and certify all counties in the WMPA as a Certified Work Ready Community by September 2016. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

**WMPA Grant \$35,000**

**Emerge West Michigan Website Portal/Mentor Connect** – Emerge is a group of public and private organizations working to provide services to entrepreneurs. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund a web portal that helps entrepreneurs get the right resources at the right time and the Mentor Connect Program which matches mentors with entrepreneurs. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

**WMPA Grant \$35,000**      Other Funding \$430,000      Total \$465,000

## Key Comments

“This initiative has allowed our region to join together to discuss significant economic issues for the entire area. West Michigan is a large and diverse region and we have worked together to plan for our future and target regional projects that will have significant impact. It is this type of collaboration and cooperation that helps West Michigan lead our state’s economic revival.”

John Weiss, Executive Director Grand Valley Metropolitan Council  
Chairman, West Michigan Prosperity Alliance  
616-776-7604

“As the deepest water port along Michigan’s west coast, the Port of Muskegon has the potential to move a variety of goods such as manufacturing and agricultural products through the port reaching the mid-west, North America, and the world. Support and financial assistance from the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance will help provide the groundwork to develop the Port of Muskegon as a multi-model regional logistics hub including access to roads, rail, air, and water.”

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director  
West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission  
231-722-7878

“Keeping Lake Michigan clean is important to everybody in West Michigan. This project will improve collaboration among the region’s local watershed organizations and support their efforts to protect this vital regional asset.”

Steve Bulthuis  
Executive Director Macatawa Area Coordinating Council  
616-395-2688

“I am delighted to see the Connect Michigan project approved for funding by the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance board. Having worked with the Connect Michigan team over the last couple years, I have witnessed first-hand the tangible results they have brought to the communities Michigan Works! West Central serves. Seeing them work with a variety of groups and being able to consistently bring the broadband providers to these settings, is a testament to the great partnerships they have established, that will now allow the region as a whole to benefit from, by increasing broadband connectivity to better serve our residents and businesses.”

Paul Griffith, Executive Director  
Michigan Works! West Central  
231-660-0263

“This grant comes at a time when it is becoming more and more difficult to find qualified job candidates for the many good paying jobs in the manufacturing, healthcare and construction sectors. The grant will accelerate efforts by Michigan Work Ready Communities to build awareness of the National Career Readiness as a tool for employers to help them identify individuals with the foundational skills for employment.”

Kevin Stotts, President  
Talent 2025  
616-230-6344

“These projects focus on key private sector needs: infrastructure, talent, entrepreneurship and the environment. They will be a catalyst for public-private partnerships in our region and it is great to see them moving forward with defined action plans.”

Andy Johnston,  
West Michigan Chamber Coalition  
616-771-0335