



2026

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



**EXPLORE
HOSPITALITY**

ABOUT THE COUNCIL

MISSION AND VISION

Explore Hospitality's mission is simple: Elevating West Michigan by developing, cultivating talent, and promoting a dynamic hospitality industry. We believe that investing in the industry and attracting and developing skilled workers will create sustainable career pathways and lead to world-class service throughout the region.



INDUSTRY IMPACT

The hospitality industry contributed more than \$3.5 billion in Gross Regional Product to West Michigan in 2025. Currently, more than 68,000 people are employed in the hospitality industry in our region, and opportunities continue to expand as the industry grows. This year, more than 30 of the most in-demand jobs in our region are in hospitality.

Explore Hospitality includes leaders from the industry, economic development, workforce development, K-12 and higher education. The council works together to identify short and long-term industry needs and develop actionable projects to ensure our workforce has the skills to keep the industry thriving.

Over the past year, Explore Hospitality has built strong community partnerships and approved its first projects, marking a major step forward for our council. As momentum grows, we are actively developing and participating in workforce initiatives that strengthen our talent pipeline and elevate career opportunities across the region. With collaboration at our core, we are proud to see this collective effort driving meaningful impact for the hospitality industry and the broader community.

- Ross Bartlet, AHC Hospitality

OUR STRATEGY

ELEVATE • TRAIN • RETAIN



ELEVATE

We are dedicated to promoting hospitality as a sustainable career pathway for all ages.



TRAIN

We provide resources for employers looking to upskill new or current employees and create a sustainable talent pipeline for West Michigan's hospitality industry.



RETAIN

We create or promote beneficial retention programs and projects aimed at keeping our current talent in the hospitality industry.



WORKFORCE TOGETHER LUNCH AND LEARN WORKSHOPS

The Workforce Together Lunch & Learn workshop on West Michigan Works!' Retention Solutions Network provided attendees with meaningful connections and actionable insights to address a variety of employee retention challenges. By engaging with local leaders and resource partners, participants gained practical strategies from navigating childcare to transportation barriers.

Workforce Together Lunch and Learn panelists described the Retention Solutions Network as an extension of their HR department. I appreciated learning about the success coaches. The wide range of available resources also stood out, especially their hands-on approach and ongoing support throughout the entire process.

- Abigail Walwood, Almond Products



51
ATTENDEES

3
MULTI-INDUSTRY LUNCH
AND LEARNS HOSTED



BE THE DIFFERENCE

MICAREERQUEST

At MiCareerQuest, 8,100+ students in grades 8-10 learned about 21 hospitality careers through interactive exhibits on food and beverage, lodging, transportation, entertainment and recreation and event planning. Students were garnishing brownies, changing lug nuts, creating music, prepping for events, participating in fitness challenges and more! Students were impressed with the wide array of career pathways within hospitality and were inspired to explore pathways they hadn't considered or did not know existed.



What I liked best about MiCareerQuest was getting to explore different careers in a hands-on way. It was fun to try activities, learn about new jobs and talk to professionals about what they do every day. The experience helped me think more about my future and the kinds of careers I might enjoy.

- Mukunzi, Burton Middle School



8
HOSPITALITY EXHIBITORS

90
SCHOOLS

21
HOSPITALITY CAREERS
SPOTLIGHTED

BE THE CHANGE



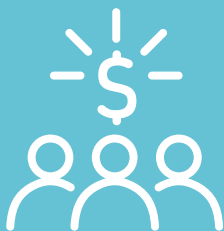
MiCareerQuest was one of the most rewarding volunteer opportunities I've participated in for a long time. I'm passionate about mentorship and helping young people discover career paths they may not otherwise know exist. If even a few students left with a new possibility to consider, then it was a successful day.

- Amy Young, Destination Consultants



Events like this are important because they introduce students to a wide range of opportunities beyond traditional career paths. It was rewarding to show how passions, whether for food, design, nature or creating memorable experiences, can become meaningful, successful careers. Encouraging students to see that they can turn what they love into what they do every day was the best reward.

- Jess Haisma, Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park



\$158,100
TRAINING
DOLLARS
INVESTED



53
PROFESSIONALS
TRAINED



17
ENGAGED
BUSINESSES

WORKPLACE WELLBEING SUMMIT

The West Michigan Works! Industry Talent Councils hosted a Workplace Wellbeing Summit to help business and community partners focus on mental health in the workplace. The summit equipped employers with practical tools and resources and shared strategies to embed mental health best practices into everyday operations. Through open dialogue and collaboration, participants explored meaningful ways to foster healthier, more supportive work environments for all employees.



The Workplace Wellbeing Summit was both insightful and inspiring, offering practical resources that are helping us rethink and strengthen how we support mental health at work.

-Jae Corse, Legends Global

25

ORGANIZATIONS

95

ATTENDEES



56

PROJECT
VOLUNTEERS



8,819

STUDENTS
EXPLORED CAREERS



10

EVENT
ATTENDEES





COUNCIL MEMBERS

- ROSS BARTLETT
COUNCIL CHAIR
AHC HOSPITALITY
- LISA CALHOUN
COUNCIL VICE CHAIR
SHERATON GRAND RAPIDS
AIRPORT HOTEL
- DR. WERNER ABSENGER
GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY
COLLEGE
- HEATHER DAY
GERALD R. FORD INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT AUTHORITY
- CAROL KENDRA
FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS &
SCULPTURE PARK
- JANET KORN
EXPERIENCE GRAND RAPIDS
- KEVIN VOS
COREWELL HEALTH
- RICHARD MACKEIGAN
LEGENDS GLOBAL
- LAURA MOTUSH
KENT CAREER
TECH CENTER
- JANE NEWTON
CREATIVE DINING SERVICES
- DR. MICHAEL SCIARINI
GRAND VALLEY STATE
UNIVERSITY
- AMY YOUNG
DESTINATION CONSULTANTS
- AMY LEBEDNICK
WEST MICHIGAN WORKS!

FUNDERS

- MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT
OF LABOR AND
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
- EXPERIENCE GRAND RAPIDS
- WEST MICHIGAN WORKS!
- KENT ISD
- FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS
AND SCULPTURE PARK
- ACRISURE AMPHITHEATER
- GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY
COLLEGE



West Michigan Works! is a division of ACSET, an equal opportunity employer/program and a proud partner of the American Job Center network. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. West Michigan Works! is supported by state and federal funds; more details at westmiworks.org/about/.



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HOSPITALITY