



Business
Leaders
For Michigan

Michigan in a **New Era**

We're living in an era of rapid change. New technologies, rising uncertainty and competition in a global economy demand faster, more adaptive responses and a new kind of resilience.

Old assumptions no longer hold, and legacy systems that once worked for Michigan have struggled to keep pace. As a true purple state — where political control regularly shifts between parties — and with an economy highly exposed to disruption, Michigan often struggles to stay the course. Priorities swing and progress stalls, not from a lack of good ideas or dedicated leaders, but from a lack of continuity and follow-through.

That past inconsistency has had real consequences, especially in areas like education, talent and competitiveness — all which shape Michigan's long-term success. These aren't partisan issues, and getting them right takes focus and the resolve to see them through, no matter who holds office. Purple can be a strength, one that fosters broader buy-in, stronger guardrails and lasting results.

Michigan has faced turning points before, but this moment is different. The pace of change today — in technology, talent and global competition — leaves no room for short-term thinking or half measures. For Michigan to lead in one of the most dynamic periods of innovation in our lifetimes, we need a vision and a plan built to endure.

As Business Leaders For Michigan, our companies are woven into the fabric of this state — part of its past, present and future. Our team members live throughout Michigan, helping power our economy and contribute to communities as parents, neighbors and friends. We work every day to attract, develop and keep talent, compete on a global stage and ensure Michigan continues to grow and prosper. That perspective, grounded in experience and guided by a deep belief in Michigan and its people, drives our commitment to practical, lasting solutions that help families and communities thrive while strengthening the state we all call home.

That commitment is the foundation of *Michigan in a New Era* — a blueprint for current leaders, the next governor, legislature and those who follow. It provides long-term direction that will raise incomes, attract new investment and expand opportunity for every Michigander. It calls for education that strengthens Michigan's future, efficient government that removes barriers and leadership that delivers accountability and results.

The goal is simple: to lift people up and position Michigan to lead in a world that's moving faster and demanding more than ever before.

This is a plan for the people of Michigan — and for the next generation of leaders.

This is a plan for Michigan in a new era.

Contents

6 Executive Summary

10 Building on Michigan's Strengths

12 Priorities for Michigan in a New Era



Transform Education as Michigan's Defining Mission



Make Michigan the Easiest State to Build and Grow



Activate Michigan's Economic Potential

34 Succeeding in a New Era



Executive Summary

In 2009, at the depths of the Great Recession, Michigan ranked 49th in the nation across key economic and growth measures. We've made real progress since then — climbing as high as 27th — but many of our challenges began long before the recession. As a result, even as we've gained ground, other states have moved faster.

Decades of slow population growth, industrial disruptions, talent outmigration and policy inconsistency — the “Michigan 180” — have limited our ability to sustain momentum, even during national expansions.

The trends have existed throughout much of our lives:

- Michigan ranks 50th in household income growth over the past 25 years.
- High-wage professional service jobs, which pay about 20% more than average, have grown 35% nationally but remained flat in Michigan for over two decades.
- Over the last 30 years, Michigan has fallen from 16th to 44th in fourth grade reading and now has one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the nation.

It's meant that we've struggled to advance against top-performing states in key areas:

- Real median household income: 35th
- Per capita GDP: 36th
- Educational attainment: 35th

The challenge today is twofold: other states are surging ahead, and the pace of change is accelerating. Every year of slow growth widens the gap further. Standing still now means falling further behind.

Families and businesses live these realities every day with tighter budgets and tougher competition. We need to make sure that when people ask, “Can I build a good life in Michigan?” the answer is yes.

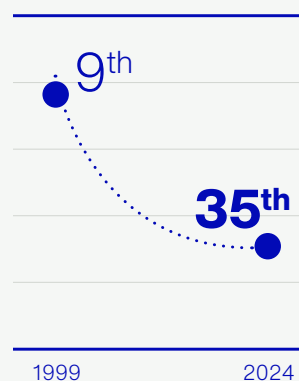
Michigan has wrestled with reform and reinvention for decades. The challenges, though, are bigger than any single governor, legislature, political party or interest group can tackle on their own, and are rooted in some of the same forces that once fueled our success.

Meeting this moment will require collective effort and sustained focus. This plan provides the foundation for how we can do that — together — to secure Michigan's next era of growth and opportunity.

Michigan incomes are falling further behind

Median household income is one of the clearest signals of a state's competitiveness. For families, it reflects whether they can keep pace with rising costs. For businesses, it signals whether Michigan can grow, attract and retain the skilled workforce and consumer strength that drive a thriving economy. For Michigan to have a fighting chance in this new era, we must ensure that the people who call this state home are thriving, not just surviving.

Real Median Household Income: 35th



Our state is **50th in income growth** over the past 25 years

Compared to people in other states, the average Michigan household makes:

\$5K less than in the average state
\$18K less than in Top 10 states

Source: American Community Survey 1-year estimates



A new era demands a future-ready Michigan

We are living in a new era — shaped by disruption:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation
- Global supply chain transformations
- Economic and environmental volatility
- Inflation and rising costs
- Demographic shifts and an aging population
- Populism and distrust in institutions

Strategies that once worked may no longer fit the scale or complexity of today's challenges.

For Michigan to succeed in this new era, it must become future-ready. That means:

- An economy that is adaptive and resilient, evolving with new technologies, industries and global markets — not just reacting to disruption but anticipating and shaping it.
- People with the skills, creativity and mindset to navigate change and seize opportunity — supported by talent pipelines aligned with the ideas, opportunities and industries that will define the future.

Leading for a new era

There are things we can control and things we can't. What must be different is our determination to use the same factors that have helped other states reshape their economies and their futures. Michigan's success will need these elements:

Governor-driven leadership

In an era characterized by rapid change and deep divisions, and a state with systems that are often fragmented and outdated, few leaders are better positioned to shape the future than our governor. With the bully pulpit and the levers of power, a governor has a unique opportunity to set a clear course, align stakeholders and build the mandate needed to drive change. The goal isn't an agenda just for a governor or a political party — it's a strategy for all of Michigan, driven in partnership with the legislature and sustained beyond political terms and leaders to create lasting change for the state and its people.

Reforms with staying power

Success means reforms that stick. It requires laws and budgets that lock in progress, accountability systems that promote transparency, and leaders across government, business, labor and communities who stay aligned around a shared vision. Real progress turns short-term wins into measurable, durable change — strong enough to outlast political cycles and shift Michigan's long-term trajectory.

Public engagement and broad coalitions

Transformation takes buy-in. Michiganders need to understand the urgency, see progress and know that leaders are accountable for results. Lasting reform depends on broad, cross-sector coalitions working together and championing change, and empowerment of those ready to lead and courageous enough to do things differently.

Priorities

At the core of *Michigan in a New Era* are three priorities — the levers that, when pulled with focus and discipline, move everything else. Michigan faces many challenges, but these three areas are within our control and have the greatest power to change our trajectory. They're the foundation for a stronger economy and a better quality of life for every student, worker, business and community.

These priorities cut across education, talent and the economy, creating ripple effects that strengthen schools, expand opportunities and make Michigan a place where more people can build a good life.



Transform Education as Michigan's Defining Mission

Strong schools benefit everyone. Education fuels opportunity, higher incomes and a stronger, more agile economy. Michigan can and must do better for our kids — and other states have shown what's possible.

The governor must lead Michigan's education transformation.

We've reached a moment where the only leader positioned to reverse our slide and overcome fractured governance, competing priorities and diffuse accountability in education is the governor. The scope and urgency of reform now requires a governor's leadership to bring clarity and alignment for teachers, parents and schools so that students get results.

Ensure every child can read by third grade.

Use proven, science-based methods to build a strong foundation for learning — because today, three in four Michigan students aren't proficient readers, placing our state in the bottom 10 nationally.

Tackle chronic absenteeism.

Reverse the trend that leaves one in four students missing more than 10% of the school year, slowing their learning and progress.¹

Set a high standard for a high school diploma.

Ensure every graduate demonstrates relevant competencies and is prepared for college, training and a career.

Seamlessly connect students to apprenticeships, college and careers.

Ensure ease of access and outcomes that provide in-demand skills to open doors beyond high school.





Make Michigan the Easiest State to Build and Grow

Starting and growing a business and building more housing or new developments in Michigan should be straightforward. Yet too often, approvals are slow, unpredictable and burdened by red tape. This isn't about lowering standards — it's about making government work the way people expect and deserve: timely answers, clear rules and a shift from gatekeeping to problem-solving.

Michigan must make it easier to be an entrepreneur and faster to build the housing, infrastructure and communities our state urgently needs. Businesses can't grow without places to invest, and families can't thrive without affordable places to live and work.

Enable progress rather than blocking it. Create responsive systems and a culture that moves faster, with predictable approvals, simpler processes and excellent customer service.

Make building homes, businesses and infrastructure more affordable. Set clear, consistent standards and grant an automatic green light when they're met.

Support and reward communities that embrace growth. Recognize competitive communities and invest in local governments that streamline regulations and modernize development rules.



Activate Michigan's Economic Potential

Michigan's economic potential lies in putting our assets to work, embracing growth and building what's next — the conditions for entrepreneurs to grow, workers to advance, and talent to stay and succeed here. Competing in a world where new industries are emerging and others are aggressively investing demands a modern economic development system — one that brings together the collective efforts of the state, regional organizations, universities, businesses and communities to remove barriers for growth, attract new investment and develop the skilled workforce needed to drive innovation.

Build the economic development system of the future. Michigan must reimagine and reset its economic development system, thinking beyond any one organization to put in place key elements for success: a clear vision, empowered regions and the structure and funding to assure consistency, accountability and long-term progress.

Attract and retain talent for Michigan. Make it easier to build and grow the communities young people want and use direct marketing, outreach and tools for attraction and retention.

This plan isn't just about addressing challenges. It's about creating a strategy that seizes the extraordinary opportunities of one of the most dynamic periods of innovation and progress in our lifetimes — and working hard to make sure we stick with and execute it.

Beyond a set of new priorities, a new era calls for a new mindset — one that sees our range of perspectives as a strength, finds common ground to solve big problems and sets a higher standard for how we work together.

Building on Michigan's Strengths

There's much to celebrate about Michigan's people and hard-won assets. This plan is about fully leveraging our strengths to overcome obstacles and succeed in the decades ahead. By building on Michigan's unique advantages in innovation, manufacturing and talent development, we can turn short-term gains into sustained, long-term competitiveness.

An R&D powerhouse: With more than \$25 billion in corporate R&D and \$3.5 billion in university-driven research each year, Michigan ranks among the Top 10 R&D states — fueling the next generation of breakthroughs in technology, mobility and manufacturing.

Advancing healthcare innovation: From Grand Rapids' Medical Mile to Detroit's new Henry Ford Health + Michigan State University Health Sciences Research Center — and through Michigan-based innovators like Stryker advancing medical technology worldwide — our state is shaping the future of health and life sciences innovation across research, care and manufacturing.

Detroit — A big-city comeback: After more than 50 years of population declines, Michigan's largest city is growing again. From new businesses and restored neighborhoods to packed festivals and bustling downtown streets, Detroit's energy and optimism are unmistakable as residents and newcomers alike fuel a renewed confidence in the city's future.

A gateway for trade: Opening in 2026, the Gordie Howe International Bridge will strengthen one of North America's busiest trade corridors and unlock new economic opportunity from Toronto to Detroit and Windsor to Chicago. Together with the modernized Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie and major ports, air, rail and logistics hubs across the state, Michigan connects markets and moves goods across the Midwest and beyond.

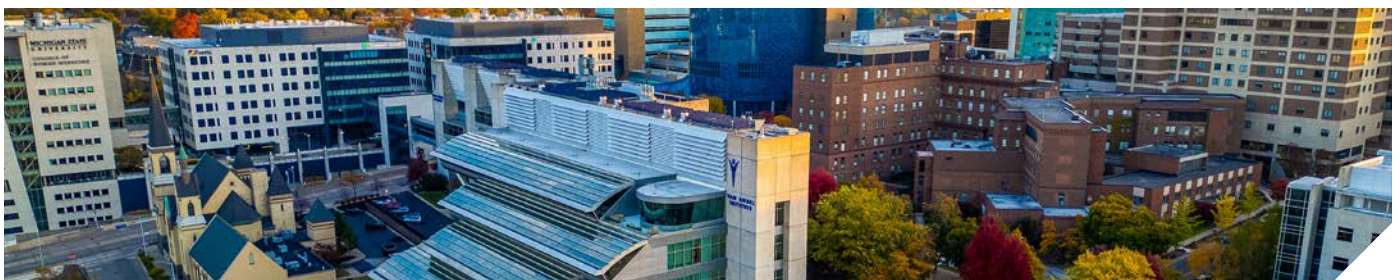
A quality-of-life edge: Michigan's Great Lakes, forests and outdoor destinations are economic powerhouses as well as natural treasures. From Marquette to Mackinac, Holland and Monroe, our recreation and tourism economy supports small businesses, attracts talent and celebrates the quality of life that defines Michigan.

Innovation that scales: The University of Michigan ranked second nationally in new startup launches in 2024 — ahead of Stanford and MIT — and a growing class of new billion-dollar companies has emerged in the state.

Diverse agricultural base: From the orchards of Traverse City to the farms of the Thumb and the vineyards of Southwest Michigan — Michigan is second only to California for diversity of crops and agricultural commodities.

Billions in new community investments: From the rebirth of Michigan Central in Detroit to the Acrisure Amphitheater in downtown Grand Rapids and the expansion of semiconductor manufacturing in the Great Lakes Bay Region, major investments are reshaping communities across the state and strengthening Michigan's foundation for growth.

Makers and problem solvers: Michigan's edge has always come from its people — engineers, designers and builders who turn ideas into industrial scale production. With the nation's highest concentration of engineers, Michigan talent is driving innovation in mobility, energy and advanced manufacturing.





Traits of top-performing states

Top-performing states — and those making notable progress toward the top — share key traits. While no state is perfect, successful states create policy and add emphasis around these hallmarks of lasting success.

Consistent

Strong cohesion and the ability to focus, work together and set and implement a strategy that is given time to show results.

Competitive

A well-managed, fiscally stable, innovative and growth-friendly environment with a strong talent base and education systems.

Comprehensive

Integrated solutions that address root causes rather than relying on shiny objects or quick fixes.

Across all three areas, Michigan struggles. As one of the nation's few long-standing purple states, its diverse geography and political divisions have too often stalled cooperation and reversed attempts at long-term reform. The result: slower growth.

By looking to these traits and building on its strengths with the right strategy, Michigan can fuel lasting prosperity for people and communities across the state.

Priorities

for Michigan in a New Era



Transform Education as
Michigan's Defining Mission



Make Michigan the Easiest
State to Build and Grow



Activate Michigan's
Economic Potential





Transform Education as Michigan's Defining Mission

We share one goal: every Michigan child should have the chance to learn, grow and thrive. Education is the engine of opportunity and freedom — more skills mean more choices about work, where to live and how to build a life. It raises incomes and provides stability. Across the state, parents, educators, employers and neighbors want our kids to discover their talents and pursue their dreams.

A strong system gives every child — no matter their ZIP code — a fair chance to succeed. Yet we're asking today's students to meet tomorrow's demands with a system built for the 19th century — one that may have served the 20th century well but is no longer fit for a new era.

Consider where Michigan stands today:

Declining outcomes:

Michigan fell from 16th to 44th in fourth grade reading since 1998 and from 10th to 34th in fourth grade math since 2000.² In that same time frame, Mississippi, despite having less funding per pupil moved from 49th to ninth in fourth grade reading.³

Chronic absenteeism:

One in four students is chronically absent and Michigan was 37th in the latest nationwide ranking.⁴

Statewide challenges:

7 out of 8 Michigan districts do worse than their peers in top states in math and 71% of Michigan districts underperform national comparison districts in graduation rates.⁵

This is a wake-up call, not a verdict. We've tried various solutions in the past, but we've bounced back and forth as politics has intervened. **It's time to pick a strategy and stick with it.** By keeping outcomes for kids at the center of the conversation, we can move from politics to purpose. Our kids need a system that learns, evolves and innovates so every student is ready for tomorrow. If we deliver, we'll lift a generation and strengthen Michigan's future.



Barriers to Break

Consistent

Fragmented governance

Michigan’s education system lacks a unifying vision and clear accountability. Authority is splintered across the governor, State Board of Education, state superintendent, intermediate school districts, local districts, and colleges and universities, which creates overlapping agendas, competing priorities and siloed efforts. Political turnover, partisan debates and shifting priorities break momentum, and proven strategies fade before delivering results.

Competitive

Uneven instruction and leadership

Student success depends on strong teachers and leaders, yet Michigan struggles to support them. Low starting salaries make it hard to attract and retain teachers, discouraging many from viewing teaching in Michigan as a serious career option. Transparency is weak, resources are uneven and enrollment declines pit districts against each other.

Comprehensive

Compliance over outcomes

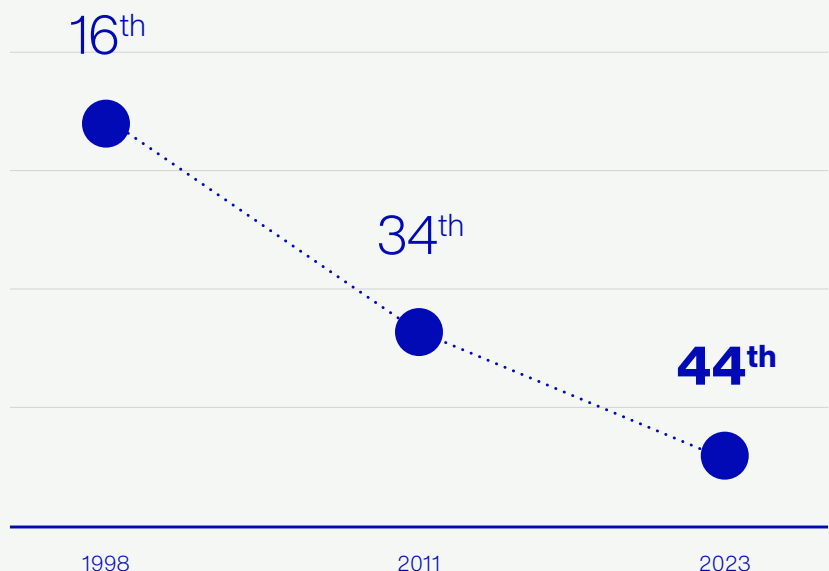
Current systems emphasize reporting and procedural compliance more than student growth and long-term success. Without a focus on measurable outcomes and integrated, reciprocal accountability, improvement efforts remain fragmented and fail to address the root causes of underperformance.

“We’ve done a lot of good, but here are some hard truths. Just 24% of 4th graders can read proficiently... We spend more and we get less. It’s not acceptable. For our kids, let’s do better. Let’s face our literacy crisis with fierce urgency.”

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer,
2025 State of
the State Address

Michigan ranks 44th in 4th grade reading proficiency

Source: *The Nation’s Report Card*



Actions to Take

The path forward requires clarity and focus. Tangible actions and policies must be bold, measurable and outcome-driven — not ideological. Defined this way, they create urgency, guide investment and align the entire system around what Michigan must deliver.



An education system for the 21st century

We're well into the 21st century, yet Michigan's education system was built for a world that no longer exists. Our kids deserve better — an education that equips them not just for today's opportunities, but for a future that will demand new skills, new ways of thinking and the resilience to thrive in constant change.

- A system that puts students at the center
- A system focused on achieving competencies in both academic and life skills
- A system that encourages innovation and gives schools and districts the freedom and support to accelerate change

1. The governor must lead Michigan's education transformation.

We've reached a moment where the only leader positioned to reverse our slide and overcome fractured governance, competing priorities and diffuse accountability in education is the governor. The scope and urgency of reform now requires a governor's leadership to bring clarity and alignment for teachers, parents and schools so that students get results.

This cannot be about incremental fixes. Michigan must reimagine education at the scale of the challenge — broad enough to reach every district, deep enough to address root causes and durable enough to outlast political cycles.

For decades, competing interests and shifting priorities have left Michigan lurching from one policy experiment to the next. Diffuse control and lack of accountability across the system have slowed progress. Taking ownership of systemic reform can break through this gridlock — unifying parents, educators, employers, legislators and advocates around a shared vision for quality outcomes powered by equitable funding, aligned governance and real accountability. Most importantly, it reframes education not as a siloed issue, but as central to Michigan's long-term competitiveness and prosperity.

Leading this transformation means a commitment to:

- Establish clear priorities** and maintain a focus on driving outcomes throughout their time in office and beyond.
- Align budgets and agencies** to support those priorities with equity and accountability.
- Mobilize broad coalitions** of educators, parents, employers and bipartisan legislators to sustain change.
- Ensure reforms are systemic, scalable and enduring**, not one-off projects or short-lived mandates.
- Implement a shared-accountability system** focused on student growth, with supports when progress stalls and clear actions when goals go unmet, so every Michigan student graduates with the future-ready skills to be successful.

Case Study

Maryland set a high standard with comprehensive education reform

Enacted in 2021, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is a sweeping reform of the state's public education system designed to improve equity and outcomes. High schools must offer rigorous college and technical pathways, including dual enrollment and apprenticeships, with progress overseen by an independent Accountability and Implementation Board. The plan elevates teaching through higher preparation standards, better salaries and career ladders that reward expertise. It phases in major investments to expand early childhood education, raise teacher pay and strengthen college and career readiness.⁶

Pillars of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future



Early Childhood Education



High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders



College and Career Readiness



More Resources for Students to Be Successful



Governance and Accountability

2. Ensure every child can read by third grade.

Early literacy is the foundation for all future learning. Students who are not reading at grade level by third grade are far more likely to fall behind in every subject and struggle to catch up. Decades of research point to proven curricula, techniques and approaches for teaching reading. Reading at grade level is not just an academic milestone — it is the essential building block of a thriving, equitable education system and economy.

Mississippi's rise from the bottom to the Top 10 in literacy shows what's possible with clear goals, an evidence-based plan and sustained commitment. Tennessee⁷, Louisiana⁸ and Indiana⁹ have used similar strategies to see significant positive leaps in rankings.

Michigan has replicated parts of these best practices, such as the 2024 literacy law requiring a statewide shift to the science of reading, but work remains and implementation still lies ahead.

- Fully implement the Every Child READS framework** (Right Curriculum, Every Educator Trained, Assessment, Data, Systems) from Launch Michigan.

Case Study

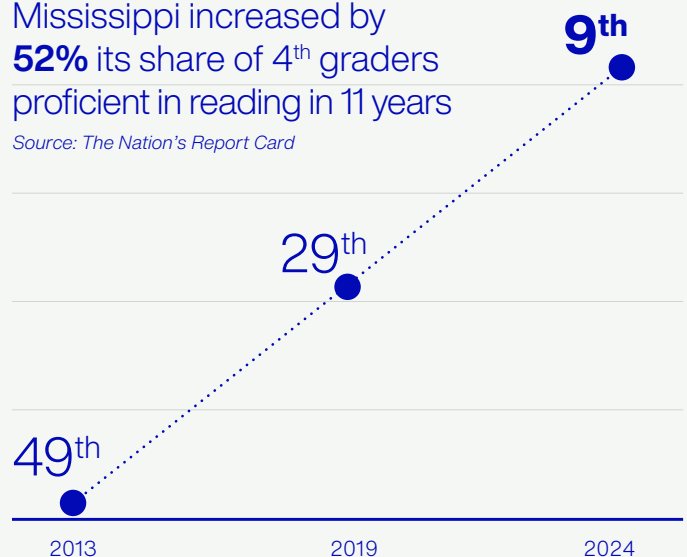
Literacy reform brought Mississippi from 49th to 9th in 11 years

Mississippi's successful literacy reform, starting with the Literacy-Based Promotion Act in 2013, emphasized teacher training in the science of reading, required students to pass a reading test to advance from third grade, deployed literacy coaches and introduced early screening for challenges like dyslexia. The governor's leadership created urgency, focused attention and resources, and, with a strong state superintendent, made literacy a driver of long-term success.

4th Grade Reading

Mississippi increased by **52%** its share of 4th graders proficient in reading in 11 years

Source: *The Nation's Report Card*





3. Tackle chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism — missing more than 10% of the school year — has serious consequences. Students who miss too much school are less likely to read at grade level, graduate on time or be ready for college and careers. Yet one in four Michigan students is chronically absent, placing us in the bottom third nationally.¹⁰ Some districts have made progress, but Michigan lacks a statewide plan to improve attendance.

- Draw on proven models to reverse chronic absenteeism** by tracking attendance with a statewide early-warning system, using home visits to uncover and address challenges, and partnering with parents and communities to build a culture of showing up before absenteeism takes hold.

1 in 4

Michigan students are chronically absent.

4. Set a high standard for a high school diploma.

A Michigan high school diploma must guarantee that every graduate is prepared for college, training or a career. It should signify real competency — not just attendance or course completion. Today, too many students graduate unprepared, leaving opportunities out of reach.

States like Maryland show what's possible when we raise expectations and align graduation standards with the skills students need to succeed in work and life.

Michigan can do the same:

- Establish the Michigan Education Guarantee (MEG)** to set a rigorous statewide graduation standard that ensures readiness for college, skilled trades and careers.
- Offer multiple high school diploma pathways**, providing academic, skilled trades, and career-focused options that reflect Michigan's diverse economy.
- Expand career and technical education (CTE)** by fully funding programs and by providing equitable access to vocational programs statewide.
- Adopt competency-based learning** so students demonstrate mastery through applied skills and performance, not just seat time.

5. Seamlessly connect students to apprenticeships, college and careers.

Success today requires skills and learning that go beyond high school. Whether through apprenticeships, skilled trades, community college, four-year degrees or on-the-job training, every pathway exists to do the same essential thing: equip people with knowledge and skills that open doors.

When young people can pursue these paths with confidence, they not only secure good-paying jobs and brighter futures for themselves, but they also strengthen Michigan’s economy. The state has been making progress, with the Community College Guarantee, Michigan Reconnect, the Michigan Achievement Scholarship and the Going PRO Talent Fund. The key is to make these pathways stronger, more accessible and better connected so that every young adult has a real chance to keep moving forward.

Only 7% of students dual enroll in college while in high school, and nearly half of students who continue past high school fail to earn a credential within six years.¹¹ Any credential beyond high school adds 66% or more to a worker’s income, with a bachelor’s degree more than doubling it. We must do more to help students access the skills and training they need post-high school, expanding career opportunities, raising incomes and increasing economic growth.

Michigan must:

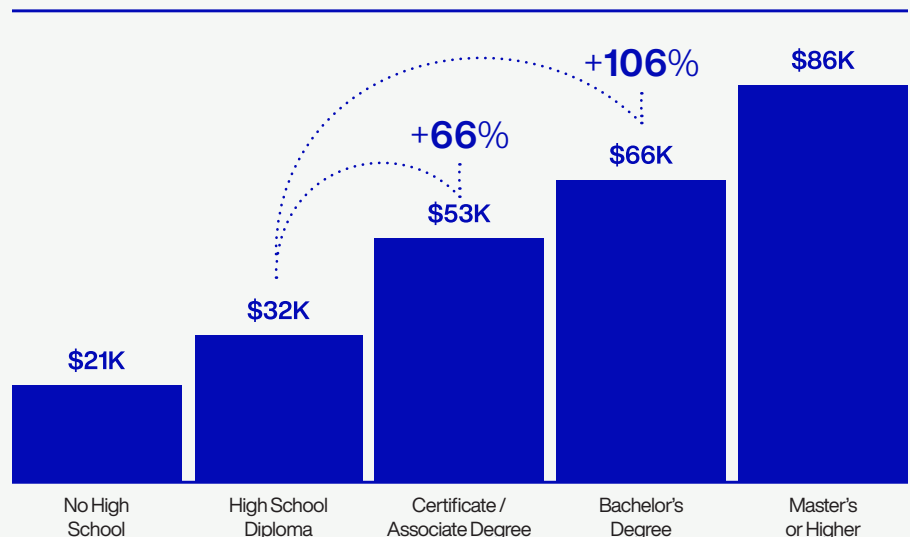
- **Continue progress toward the Sixty by 30 goal**, building on the increase from 38% to 52% of Michiganders with a postsecondary credential over the last decade and ensuring that 60% reach that milestone by 2030.¹²
- **Create a coherent lifelong learning system** by connecting early childhood, K–12, community colleges, apprenticeships and four-year institutions.
- **Expand dual enrollment, apprenticeships and work-based learning** in high school while reforming funding, so districts aren’t unintentionally penalized for providing these opportunities.
- **Expand career counseling capacity** in high schools and colleges, aligned with real labor market needs.
- **Improve community college outcomes** through graduation support, performance-based funding, seamless transfer pipelines and employer partnerships that connect credentials to in-demand skills.

Education pays off

An associate degree boosts median wages by **66%** compared to a high school diploma, while a bachelor’s degree more than doubles them.

Source: MI School Data, US Census

Median Annual Wages in MI after Five Years (2024)





Make Michigan the Easiest State to Build and Grow

For Michigan to thrive — creating jobs, raising incomes, building housing, upgrading infrastructure and making it easier to start and grow a business — we need clear rules and timely decisions. We need a streamlined government that lets people put their time, talent and capital to work. Right now, too many people are stuck in a maze — repeating paperwork, chasing signatures, getting different answers and waiting months for a simple yes or no. This isn't about lowering standards, it's about timely answers, fewer barriers, better service and a shift from gatekeeping to problem-solving. States that clear the path move forward — those that don't, fall behind.

There are signs of what works in Michigan.

Detroit's 2025 small-business licensing overhaul shows how eliminating a duplicative restaurant license, extending business license renewals to two years and launching a concierge service can make it easier to operate a small business. These changes are projected to reduce business startup timelines by up to 60 days, while maintaining health and safety standards.¹³

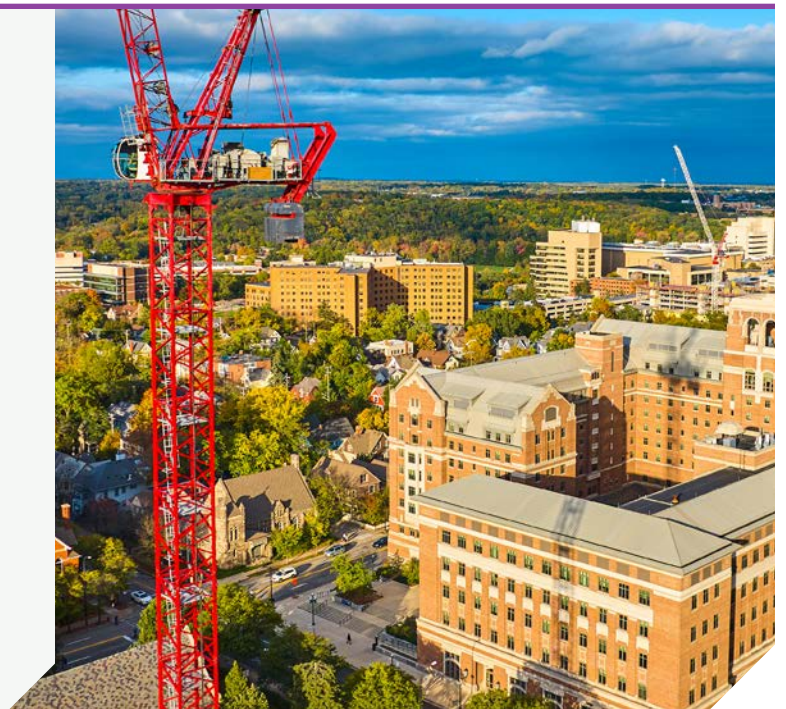
Improvements in driver's licensing and vehicle registration prove Michigan's government can deliver efficient, customer-focused service by modernizing processes and empowering staff.

Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA)'s collaborative approach to workplace safety shows how partnering with industry to seek compliance rather than just penalizing can save lives while cutting red tape.

Inefficiency is expensive

- A Michigan city's sole electrical inspector missed a scheduled visit to a nonprofit's new office space, causing cascading delays between building trades and other inspectors totaling six weeks and \$35,000.
- In Washington state, residential permit approvals average 6.5 months, adding roughly \$31,000 to each new home and pricing out more than 69,000 families.¹⁴

When processes tie up capital and delay timelines, costs climb and affordability suffers — across housing, commercial projects and new businesses. Michigan can't afford to let bottlenecks like those persist.



To compete, Michigan must apply these results-driven approaches more broadly — removing barriers, improving service and making it the easiest state in the nation to build and grow.

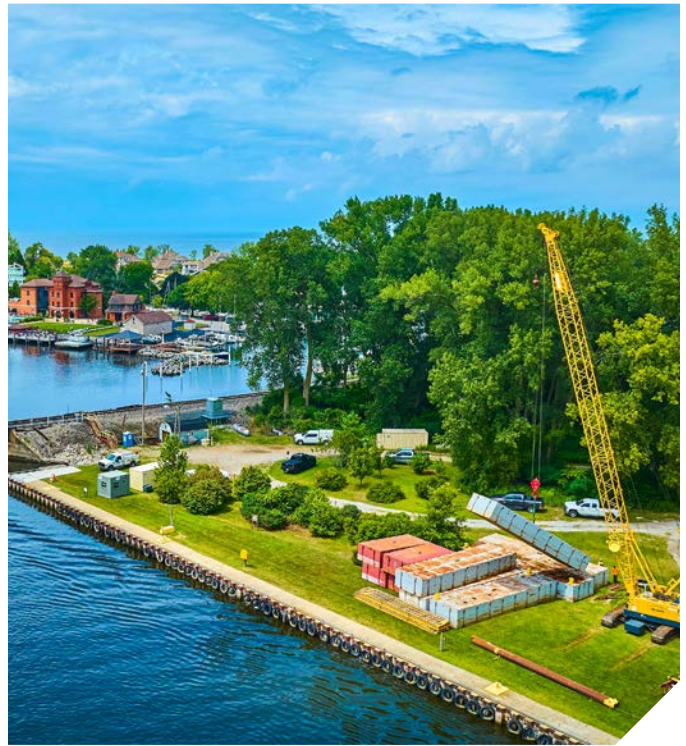
Customer service: Michigan’s state services ranked 44th in customer service satisfaction in a 2024 national survey.¹⁵

Slow approvals: Project approvals that take weeks in Ohio can take months to complete in Michigan.

Permit delays: The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) missed decision deadlines for over half of air quality permits in 2024, as well as 1 in 3 groundwater permits and 1 in 6 wetlands permits.¹⁶

Local processes: Detroit ranked 65th of 83 cities for “ease of doing business” in the most recent rankings from Arizona State University.¹⁷

Higher costs: Construction costs in metro Detroit are about 3.5% higher than Midwest peers and 13.3% higher than lower-cost locations in the South and West like Atlanta, Denver, Houston and Miami.¹⁸



Barriers to Break

Consistent

Fragmented structures and weak alignment

Overlapping regulatory authority across state, regional and local levels create conflicting requirements. Without clear alignment and shared priorities, projects stall, making coordinated progress on housing, business creation and development difficult to achieve.

Competitive

Slow and unresponsive systems and culture

Permitting and licensing processes are often unclear, slow and difficult to navigate. Limited transparency, outdated digital tools, lack of capacity (particularly at the local level) and an adversarial approach blunt progress and deter investment, weakening Michigan’s ability to compete for growth and build the future.

Comprehensive

Unclear connection between growth and opportunity

Too often, the connection between economic growth and opportunity isn’t well understood. When regional goals aren’t clearly defined and residents and local leaders don’t see how development aligns with their priorities, even transformational projects can struggle to gain support.

Case Study

Arizona Management System process improvements have endured across multiple administrations

Arizona's agencies struggled with slow approvals, inconsistent processes and poor service. In 2012, Governor Jan Brewer created the Government Transformation Office, which introduced lean management practices across agencies with support from a central team providing expertise and accountability. The Arizona Management System emphasized performance metrics and clear goals, driving efficiency and engagement. As practices took hold, agencies delivered better service and employees reported 15 percentage point higher job satisfaction.

Most importantly, these reforms have endured across the three governors of both parties. That bipartisan commitment embedded a pro-growth governing culture, turning reform from a temporary initiative into lasting change. It shows how measurable improvements can build momentum that transcends politics.



Results

60% faster delivery time for major permit projects across 23 agencies

From 90 to 30 days in application time for Community Development Block Grants to build infrastructure and housing

80% reduction in time for hazardous water quality site remedial investigations

From 50 to 10 days in processing time for residential facility licenses (assisted living, adult daycare) reduced by 80%

Source: Results AZ, *The Arizona Management System* (2022)

Case Study

Pennsylvania streamlined permitting and guaranteed timely service

Pennsylvania residents and businesses faced delays for permits, licenses, and certifications — nurses often waited over three months for licensing approval. Shortly after taking office in 2023, Governor Josh Shapiro ordered agencies to document processing times for 2,400 types of applications. The result was PAYback, a first-of-its-kind program that guarantees refunds if deadlines are missed.

To improve customer experience, the governor's team created a one-stop shop for permitting and a public dashboard to track progress. With a clear mandate, targeted resources, realistic goals and a willingness to challenge entrenched processes, they cut timelines, cleared backlogs and improved service. The result: one of the nation's most responsive permitting systems, with only three refunds issued in its first year of operation.

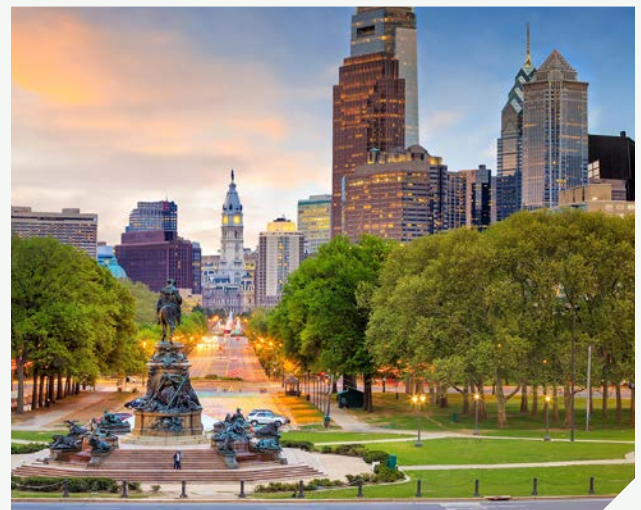
Results

From 8 weeks to 2 days for initial corporate license waiting period

From 25 days to 5 days for nurse licenses

From 6,200 to 0 in backlog birth certificate amendment requests

Only three refunds issued in the first year of PAYback's operation



Source: Institute for Responsive Government, *Pennsylvania Red Tape Reduction: A Case Study* (2025)

Case Study



Improving land use, building and talent attraction helped Grand Rapids become Michigan's fastest-growing metro

Grand Rapids has focused on growth for decades. In 2008, the city adopted sweeping zoning reforms that opened more areas to multifamily housing and by-right development, streamlining approvals and reducing outdated requirements.¹⁹ Coming out of the Great Recession, civic and business leaders launched TalentFirst, a coalition aligning employers and educators to close talent gaps, and Hello West Michigan, an effort to attract educated workers by marketing the region and supporting relocation.²⁰



Results

Focus on people and place created a more development-friendly environment and inspired confidence in the city's future:

47% growth in the downtown population between 2010 and 2020, as new apartments and infill housing came online. The city continues to expand by-right housing options with a 2024 reform package.²¹

Quality-of-life investments, including a \$700 million riverfront transformation with the 12,000-seat Acrisure Amphitheater, an 8,500-seat soccer stadium, and new mixed-use districts.²²

LinkedIn's "Cities on the Rise" recognition as a fast-growing metro for jobs and new talent.²³

Grand Rapids is the state's **fastest-growing metro area**, adding over 27,000 residents from 2020 to 2024.²⁴



Actions to Take

Leaders must take bold action to reorient Michigan toward customer service — pushing culture and systems to consistently make life easier for residents and drive economic growth. Government must create a supportive regulatory environment and be a partner — not a roadblock — in building a high-growth future that benefits everyone.



“There’s too much variation depending on which city we’re putting shovels in the ground. The development experience has been so hard at times that we’ve moved projects elsewhere.”

- Interview with a Michigan-based employer

1. Enable progress rather than blocking it.

Michigan must shift to a culture that makes development and business growth easier, faster and more predictable. That means a whole-of-government approach that prioritizes speed, customer service and accountability while assuring health and safety. Governors in Pennsylvania and Arizona have shown that tools like timeliness guarantees, public dashboards and disciplined process improvement can accelerate approvals. This approach should include:

- Drive faster, more predictable approvals** by establishing fast-track approvals for low-risk reviews and priority projects, enforcing regulatory time frames, and requiring real-time process tracking and public dashboards for transparency. Train personnel in lean management, empower teams to streamline their processes and hold agencies accountable to performance metrics.
- Ensure simpler, more responsive service** by launching a one-stop permitting portal and a concierge service for businesses of all sizes and individuals. Develop a solution-focused culture at EGLE and other agencies, using lean management and human-centered design to make processes simpler and faster.
- Lock in accountability** by backing reforms with legislation to ensure process improvements stick and the regulatory environment stays growth-oriented — from mandating regulatory time frames and real-time tracking to simplifying procurement and licensing requirements.
- Modernize licensing** with a comprehensive initiative to reduce unnecessary barriers to work in Michigan: modernize professional licensing, expand reciprocity with other states and reduce outdated requirements.
- Create a cabinet-level role** in the next administration focused on improving customer service, efficiency and transparency of state government using proven models.

2. Make building homes, businesses and infrastructure more affordable.

Michigan must make it easier, more predictable and more affordable to build thriving and economically strong communities while maintaining health, safety and resident quality of life. Streamlining government processes to speed up development benefits people directly: it creates good jobs to expand incomes, drives down housing costs, improves services and modernizes infrastructure. Rising material and labor costs are already challenges; outdated, inconsistent rules only make matters worse. Michigan should cut those barriers.

Minnesota, Montana, Oregon and other states have helped make processes more efficient to spur development and economic growth by incentivizing communities to reduce barriers to development, expanding by-right development options, or offering state alternatives to local codes. Michigan should:

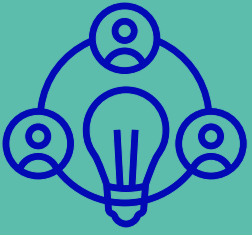
- Expand allowable and by-right development options** to reduce approval time and uncertainty.
- Harmonize municipalities' standards** to simplify processes while preserving safety and quality of life.
- Support private alternatives** to inspection and approval processes.

3. Support and reward communities that embrace growth.

Building housing and starting or growing a business in Michigan often means navigating duplicative, slow and inconsistent local processes that weaken competitiveness and push investment elsewhere. The consequences of divestment are all too familiar to Michigan communities that have seen businesses close, jobs leave and infrastructure deteriorate. Cities across the country are making progress: Oakland, California, for instance, instituted a 20-minute online process for many types of construction permits.²⁵ Michigan must encourage and reward communities that embrace economic growth:

- Create a “competitive community” designation** for local municipalities, rewarding communities that simplify processes while requiring baseline statewide standards (timelines, streamlined business licensing, transparent approvals) and prioritizing resources for improvement.
- Provide support to implement local concierge services** tasked with helping businesses navigate state, city, township or county processes.
- Provide funding and technical assistance** for regional growth plans, process streamlining and growth-oriented regulation changes.





Activate Michigan's Economic Potential

A strong economy drives prosperity for families, businesses and communities. Michigan's long struggle with income growth shows that we have work to do to strengthen competitiveness and expand opportunity. Other states are moving quickly to attract talent, capital and new industries; Michigan must do the same. A modern, well-coordinated economic development system can help close our competitive gaps by aligning public tools and private investment to unlock sites, streamline permitting and support growth in every region. By reducing redevelopment costs, improving the ease of doing business and building on regional strengths, we can create the conditions for more high-wage jobs, thriving businesses and broadly shared prosperity.

Slow economic growth:

Our economy has grown at only about one-third the national pace over the last 20 years.

Brain drain: The state's top universities are powerhouses for training in growing fields, but only 46% of STEM graduates remain in the state.

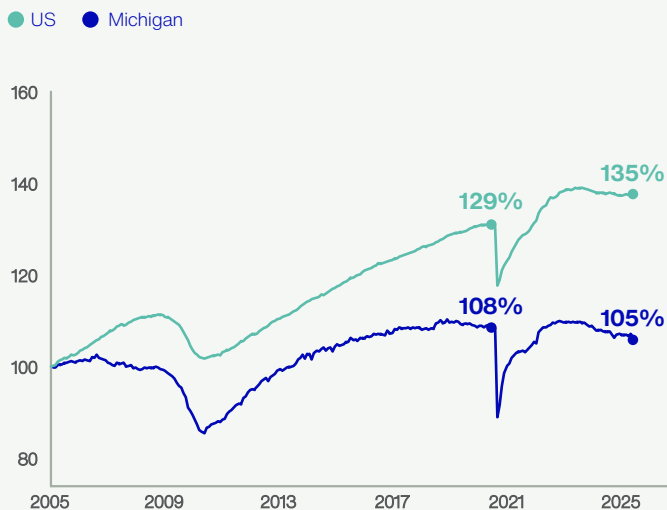
Talent attraction:

States that thrive are talent magnets, but Michigan ranks second to last in the percentage of residents born elsewhere.²⁶

Activating Michigan's economic potential means both unlocking the full value of what we already have and attracting new investment that strengthens and diversifies our economy.

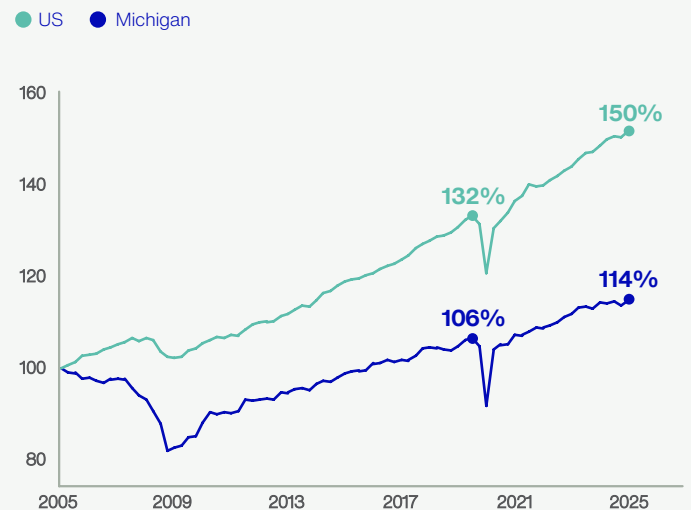
Professional services employment is growing in the US, but not in Michigan

Employment in Professional and Business Services



US real GDP grew 3x faster than Michigan's over the last 20 years

Real GDP



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Barriers to Break

Competitive

Political divisions and inconsistent funding

Michigan's economic development efforts have been hindered by political divisions, inconsistent funding and varying expectations and tools. Continuity and predictability — which other states have turned into a competitive advantage — have been harder to sustain here. As policies and structures change, stakeholders face uncertainty and the state's own economic development organization has at times struggled to maintain alignment and trust.

Comprehensive

Lack of a unified vision

Michigan's economic development system has lacked a consistent, clear, shared vision that lasts beyond terms of office. Without an integrated approach to align regions, sectors and tools, efforts remain fragmented and fail to sustain results or build durable support for economic development strategies.

Consistent

Crisis-driven, inconsistent strategy

Michigan's economic development efforts have too often been reactive — mobilizing only in moments of crisis rather than following a sustained, strategic plan. Frequent policy swings and the perception that the state prioritizes high-profile deals over steady, broad-based growth have undermined long-term confidence and continuity.



Economic development systems

Strong economic development systems across the country demonstrate a few key elements: a clear and shared **vision**, empowered **regions**, and the **structure** and long-term **funding** to ensure consistency and drive progress.

Case Study

JobsOhio uses independent funding and empowered regions to drive investment

Independent structure

JobsOhio, established in 2011 as a private nonprofit to drive statewide job creation and capital investment, is led by a nine-member governor-appointed board and staffed with teams of private-sector experts.

Independent and consistent funding

\$238 million in annual profits from the state's liquor franchise — secured through 2053 — provides a unique funding model that ensures long-term stability, shielding strategies from budget disputes and political cycles.

Empowered regions

JobsOhio relies on a strong regional partner network: seven local organizations that manage site development, workforce partnerships and business engagement in alignment with statewide priorities.

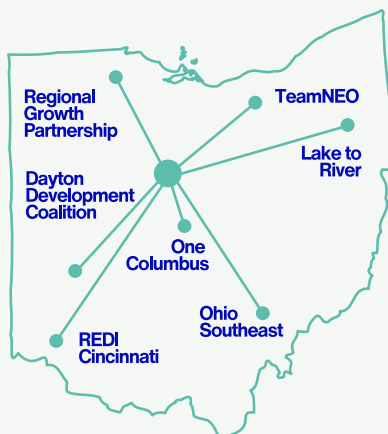
Results (2024)

By combining durable funding with an accountable, distributed structure, JobsOhio delivers measurable results — making Ohio one of the nation's most consistent and competitive states for jobs, talent and long-term growth.

377
Projects

19,338
New Jobs

\$19.3B Capital
Investment



Case Study

Virginia plans alongside its regions to drive a consistent economic development strategy

Established in 1995, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) was modeled after MEDC but has distinguished itself through discipline, regional alignment and sustained execution.

Aligned vision

VEDP operates on rolling five-year strategic plans that clarify statewide goals and build buy-in. By grounding decisions in strategy rather than politics and clarifying the investment required, Virginia's system is responsive to new opportunities, keeps partners engaged and remains consistent over time.

Empowered regions

17 regional partners help VEDP carry out the statewide strategy, focusing on regional industries and strengths. Aligning to a shared strategy has helped a state with a diverse economy and varied regional challenges move forward together.

Results

Virginia has made a clear shift to a knowledge- and innovation-based economy, with the announcement of Amazon HQ2 in 2018 demonstrating the undeniable talent base and other assets the region has developed.

\$103B capital investment brought to the state since 2018, across **620** VEDP-assisted project wins



Actions to Take

1. Build the economic development system of the future.

Michigan's size, geography and concentration in industries facing decades of steep global competition and disruption create a unique challenge for the state's economy. The economic development system of the future must meet that challenge through a collective effort — one that diversifies and strengthens Michigan's competitive advantages, grows industries and incomes, and builds on what's uniquely Michigan.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) — the state's public-private economic development organization — was groundbreaking when it was founded in 1999. Its design inspired other states to form similar partnerships. Those states found success in pairing the model with steady political alignment, long-term focus and strong fundamentals — conditions that Michigan has found hard to sustain. No single organization can transform a state's economy alone.

Concerns about transparency, oversight and uneven results have left some questioning the value of economic development. These challenges only underscore the need for a more responsive and accountable approach — not for abandoning the field. Michigan is in competition every day for jobs, talent and investment. Without a well-run, connected and transparent system, we risk being left further behind.

To position Michigan for success, the state must reimagine and strengthen our entire economic development framework — building a clear and enduring vision for growth, ensuring consistent and transparent governance, and empowering regional partners to lead with their strengths. The goal is not just to restore confidence, but to create a system that consistently delivers results: helping businesses of all sizes grow, removing barriers that slow investment and ensuring that every region of Michigan can compete and win.

Vision: Define a unifying vision that commands broad support. Michigan needs a statewide plan that everyone backs — from Detroit to the Upper Peninsula and from state agencies to local partners. It should build on and empower regional strengths and stay focused on outcomes:

more high-quality jobs, durable career paths, breaking barriers that slow projects or deter growth, and more investment. And it should endure across administrations.

The vision should center on core functions:

- Diversifying the state's economy
- Attracting and retaining companies, talent and investment
- Supporting and scaling small businesses
- Navigating and removing barriers to growth for new and legacy industries

These core functions should enable major initiatives to support and grow industry ecosystems, including catalyzing the innovation economy, maintaining R&D dominance and expanding startup and scale-up supports.

Regions: Empower and leverage regional strengths. Strong regional economies power statewide growth. Regional economic development organizations are essential: they are well-positioned to understand local assets and workforce needs; to build ties to local governments, colleges and universities, utilities and employers; and to help small businesses grow. Michigan should strengthen regional organizations to deepen local competitive advantages and improve industry ecosystems by enhancing their capabilities, providing needed resources and removing duplication with state agencies — establishing clear roles, shared metrics and accountability, and predictable support.

Structure and funding: Ensure stability, independence and accountability. Michigan's economic development funding and tool kit is unpredictable — tied to annual appropriations and economic swings — making long-term planning and competitiveness difficult to maintain. To restore consistency, the state should establish dedicated, multiyear funding with clear performance guardrails, public transparency and effective oversight. It should also update the public-private model to align with a shared statewide vision — strengthening governance to ensure organizational focus, wise use of funds and efficient operations.



EASTERN MARKET

Case Study

Colorado's innovation economy and talent attraction

Colorado built a lasting talent engine by aligning innovation, economic development and place-based appeal. Beginning in the 1990s, state leaders built upon federally anchored research and advanced industries, such as aerospace and defense, to foster an innovation-driven economy. They connected universities, research centers and private employers while investing in the infrastructure and networks needed to capture the technology wave of the 2000s. They also intentionally supported the development and attraction of outdoor recreation businesses, turning a lifestyle into an economic engine and competitive differentiator. These deliberate moves created one of the country's strongest growth engines.

Results

9th for business creation and 4th for the number of venture-backed startups per capita.²⁷

Migration fueling growth. **59% of residents were born outside of Colorado**, compared to just 24% of Michiganders – the second highest homegrown population in the nation.²⁸

A magnet for highly educated workers: **63% of working-age adults hold a postsecondary credential**, the highest rate in the nation.²⁹

Inflow of new talent has powered a thriving technology and professional services economy, driving the **5th highest median household income in the country**.

Takeaway

An effective talent strategy requires both building job opportunities and creating an ecosystem and quality of life that the nation's most mobile workers want to call home.





2. Attract and retain talent for Michigan.

Michigan must directly address both its current and future talent needs. The education section highlights important steps: improving high school graduation standards, expanding CTE, adopting competency-based learning and connecting students seamlessly to apprenticeships, college and career. All will strengthen Michigan's talent competitiveness.

But this won't be enough. Michigan's demographic realities demand that we do more to attract and retain young people and college graduates who can help drive our economy forward. Too many communities lack the amenities that make places vibrant and appealing to young people. That's why actions to make Michigan the easiest state to build and grow — and to empower regions — are so critical. Michigan must be able to activate local placemaking, transit and housing to make our state an undeniably great place to live and work.

Finally, Michigan must do more to attract the talent that can help our economy grow and effectively recruit them to our state. This requires a focused effort to enhance the qualities of our communities that young people value most, along with a coordinated campaign and tools to reach the talent Michigan needs.

Support regional economic development partners and organizations to enhance regional advantages — from recreation to transit to vibrant neighborhoods — as great places that people want to build full lives.

Expand retention and attraction tools to tip the balance on decision-making and link students and graduates with in-state employers, mentors and professional networks.

Launch targeted campaigns that market Michigan as a place where the best and brightest can live, work and thrive — combining job opportunities with quality-of-life storytelling.

Target alumni and high-demand professionals who left Michigan with tailored outreach to bring them back to invest, work and live.



Succeeding in a **New Era**

By working together to act on these recommendations, we can make the future look — and feel — entirely different. Success in this new era means families knowing they can get ahead. Opportunity is tangible: paychecks that stretch further, neighborhoods where progress is visible, and shared confidence that Michigan is the best place to live well, raise a family and prosper for generations.

Success also means an economy that is dynamic and resilient, powered by world-class education, modern infrastructure and a culture of innovation that attracts talent and investment from around the world. There's work to be done, and other states aren't standing still. Michigan must not only keep pace but set it — building on our strengths and renewing the spirit that has always defined our state.

We need leaders at every level — elected, civic, business and community — to close the gap between policy and practice, turning plans into results and delivering lasting change. Together, we can lock in reforms that endure beyond election cycles and make Michigan's transformation a reality.

This is within our reach. This is worth fighting for. With focus and resolve, Michigan can lead — in innovation, growth and opportunity.

This is Michigan in a new era.





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