



Prosperity Region 8 Regional 2024 – 2027 WIOA Plan Mid-Cycle Modification

Berrien, Cass, Van Buren Michigan Works! /BCVB Michigan Works!

Michigan Works! Southwest

Berrien, Cass, Van Buren (BCVB) Michigan Works!

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Table of Contents

1. Planning.....	3
2. Analysis of regional labor market data and economic conditions	6
3. Regional Service Strategies.....	37
4. Administrative Cost Requirements	48
5. Transportation and Supportive Service Coordination.....	48
6. Collaboration	51
7. Regional Performance Goals	54

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1. Planning

BCVB Michigan Works! provides workforce development services in the counties of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren; and workforce development services in Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties are provided by Michigan Works! Southwest. For the constructing of this Plan, together these Michigan Works! agencies, covering Prosperity Region 8, utilized labor market data and established best practices as the basis for the provision of customer services that align with the needs of both employers and job seekers. The combined efforts of the two Michigan Works! agencies provide aligned customer-centric services in a timely manner to both employers and job seekers throughout the region.

Communication

Identifying opportunities for improvement and innovation are priorities, and to ensure high quality solutions are implemented to serve job seekers and employers in the communities throughout Region 8, the leadership teams of BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest, along with business solutions, planning and program staff across all workforce development programs, communicate regularly.

Local Planning

As a result of two Michigan Works! agencies serving job seekers and employers in Region 8, separate local WIOA plans were written to address the unique needs of each area. The local WIOA plan for the Michigan Works! regional area that covers Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties was developed by BCVB Michigan Works!. The WIOA local plan that covers Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties was developed by Michigan Works! Southwest.

Policy requirements were used as a guide for this process. Strategies within the local plans include:

- Investments in economic, education and workforce training to meet the current and future needs of industry sectors within Region 8;
- Employment driven strategies among all partners within the One-Stop system;
- Alignment of employment, training, and education programs to support building a skilled workforce that meets the needs of economic, education and workforce partners.
- Innovative approach to leveraging apprenticeship programs in non-traditional industries and in-demand jobs; and
- Review and alignment with the State's WIOA Plan and the State of Michigan's Workforce Plan.

Required elements of the proposed local plans include:

- An analysis of regional and local labor market data and economic conditions. This includes a description of the strategic vision and goals of the Workforce Development Board in each local area, to prepare an educated and skilled workforce as well as an analysis of expected WIOA performance levels for Titles I, II, III and IV.
- Workforce Development Board strategies that will be leveraged to align local resources, required partners, and other entities to provide the services of the core programs that will support achieving the strategic vision and goals.
- Business solutions strategies that support the facilitation of employer engagement in workforce development programs and continuous improvement of the coordination between the workforce development programs and our economic development partners.
- A description of the one-stop delivery system.
- An assessment of local policy for updates and alignment with the updated Regional and Local WIOA plans.
- A description as to how the local area will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce development activities with transportation and other supportive services that support employment and employment retention in the local Michigan Works! areas.
- A description as to how each Workforce Development Board will coordinate workforce development activities, strategies, and services with relevant secondary and post-secondary education programs and activities and avoid duplication of services.
- A description as to how the workforce development activities of WIOA Title I are coordinated with the adult education and literacy activities of WIOA Title II.
- A description of the types of short-term and long-term training services available in Region 8.
- A description of the actions of the Workforce Development Board that support becoming or remaining high-performing boards. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of services, accessibility and continuous improvement of their one-stop centers; a description of the roles, responsibilities and contributions of each of the one-stop partners; cost allocation; and the allocation of one-stop infrastructure funding.

Regional Planning

The Regional Plan was developed collaboratively by staff in each Michigan Works! area (BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest), who met on a regular basis to discuss, write and finalize the Region 8 plan. Additionally, these staff communicated with key stakeholders to verify information included within the plan. Open and ongoing communication and partnerships with education and economic development entities throughout the region was an integral part of the preparation of this process. Upon completion of the proposed Region 8 WIOA Regional Plan, stakeholders were asked to review and provide additional input.

Both Michigan Works! areas will use the regional plan, as well as the respective local plans, to guide workforce development services throughout Region 8 over the four-year lifecycle of this plan. The following provided input for the Region 8 WIOA Regional Plan:

- Planning, Monitoring, and Policy staff from BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest;
- Business Solutions staff from BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest;
- Executive Leadership staff from BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest;
- Workforce development program staff, throughout the seven counties within Region 8 that included:
 - WIOA Adult staff,
 - WIOA Dislocated Worker staff,
 - WIOA Youth staff,
 - PATH (TANF) staff, and
 - Employment Services (Wagner-Peyser) staff.

The program staff throughout Region 8 provided information pertaining to their area of expertise that is reflective of the needs, goals and assets of Region 8. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Available education and training opportunities for the current workforce and those seeking employment throughout Region 8;
- On-the-ground trends that are being observed with employers and job seekers;
- The strengths and challenges of employers/businesses throughout Region 8;
- Assessment of core industries in the Region and the in-demand jobs to support the employer's workforce needs;
- Models for job seeking and placement to assist individuals who are unemployed and underemployed throughout the region;
- Community organizations with missions and resources that support workforce development, as well as supportive services to support gaining and retaining employment;
- Identification of other supportive services throughout the region that support job seekers in their quest for employment opportunities;
- Current and future growth and development throughout the region; and
- Other resources and tools available to all stakeholders within the region.

As the work in this plan commences, the leadership, planning and program staff from the BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest areas will have routine meetings to ensure alignment with the Regional Plan, as well as seek opportunities for improvement from employers and job seekers. Ongoing communication with education providers, economic development entities and support organizations will occur on a regular schedule as well.

Regional Service Strategies

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest have continued to refine systems and define best practices through effective communication across all levels of the organizations, including information gathering and data sharing, in order to effectively meet the needs of job seekers and employers in Region 8, and, together, will continue to explore new opportunities.

Geography

Region 8 is located in the southwest corner of Michigan. The geographic advantages of the region include the sharing of a border with Indiana, as well as a major interstate highway that connects Detroit and Chicago. The Region being in close proximity to Chicago has presented opportunities to attract employers and talent to Region 8. The region also includes a mixture of urban and rural areas that are attractive to a variety of industry sectors, which is another geographic advantage. Business Solutions Teams partner with education providers and economic developers to enhance the opportunities for employers and job seekers throughout Region 8.

2. Analysis of regional labor market data and economic conditions

Both Berrien, Cass, Van Buren Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest regularly review and analyze regional labor market data and economic conditions to inform the delivery of workforce development services and aligned focus areas, such as meeting the emerging needs of employers and filling in-demand occupations. As the Michigan Works! Agencies of Region 8, both organizations are aware of the critical need for understanding labor market data and economic conditions, to provide an effective and diverse range of workforce development services for adults and youth residing in Southwest Michigan.

Throughout the term of the Regional WIOA Plan, these Michigan Works! agencies will actively analyze information to align services that support the Michigan Statewide Workforce Plan core pillars, including increasing skill certificates or college degrees, increasing the middle class, and growing the labor force participation rate by 2027.

Population/Demographics

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), the total population of the seven county area consisting of Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Van Buren County stood at 784,356 as of 2025, an increase of 4,781 individuals (+0.6 percent) from the region's 2015 annual total. The 2025 population estimates for these seven component counties are as follows:

- Berrien 152,444
- Branch 45,993
- Calhoun 133,408
- Cass 51,677
- Kalamazoo 263,795
- St. Joseph 60,968
- Van Buren 76,071

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), race and ethnicity demographics for Region 8 are as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| • Two or more races | 8.4% |
| • Some other races | 2.4% |
| • Black/African American | 8.8% |
| • Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0.02% |
| • Asian | 1.9% |
| • Native American | 0.4% |
| • White | 78.0% |

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), the distribution of the regional population on the basis of age groups is as follows:

- 6.7% ages 15 to 19
- 7.6% ages 20 to 24
- 35.9% ages 25 to 54
- 13.0% ages 55 to 64
- 18.8% ages 65 and older

It should be noted that the region's population skews slightly younger than the state of Michigan as a whole, with the cohort ages 15-24 accounting for 14.3% of the Region 8 population (a figure 1.2 percentage points higher than the cohort's statewide average population share of 13.1%).

In analyzing regional labor market data and economic conditions, it is important to consider sector employment for Region 8 on the basis of age to identify those sectors that may be facing current or looming talent shortages as a result of outsized exposure to retirement-related risks. With a similar share, on average, of older individuals than that of the statewide population, Southwest Michigan has a slightly higher ratio of employment to population for individuals aged 55+, and slightly lower unemployment rate. Per Lightcast, the four sectors in Region 8 with the lowest levels of retirement risk exposure as of 2025 are:

- Accommodation and Food Services – 11.3% are age 55 or older
- Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services – 19.0% are age 55 or older
- Construction – 21.9% are age 55 or older
- Information – 22.1% are age 55 or older

The four sectors in Region 8 with the highest levels of retirement risk exposure as of 2025 are:

- Real Estate and Rental and Leasing – 31.7% are age 55 or older
- Other Services (except Public Administration) – 31.2% are age 55 or older
- Utilities – 29.2% are age 55 or older
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting – 29.1% are age 55 or older

Preparing for the next generation of workers to avoid gaps will be integral to the work of the Michigan Works! agencies in Region 8.

Educational Attainment in Region 8 of the Population Ages 25 and older

Planning for the growth of educational attainment levels in Southwest Michigan, the Michigan Works! Agencies in Region 8 will continue to work with regional educational partners, to develop training opportunities that meet the needs of employers in high demand industries, as well as the needs of job seekers residing in the area.

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), current educational attainment rates for the regional population ages 18 to 24 years are as follows:

- Less than High School Diploma 12.5% of the population
- High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency) 36.1% of the population
- Some College or Associate's Degree 41.8% of the population
- Bachelor's Degree or Higher 9.6% of the population

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), current educational attainment rates for the regional population ages 25 and older are as follows:

- Less than 9th Grade 2.7% of the population
- 9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma 5.5% of the population
- High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency) 29.9% of the population
- Some college, No Degree 22.4% of the population
- Associate's Degree 10.0% of the population
- Bachelor's Degree 18.2% of the population
- Graduate or Professional Degree 11.2% of the population

The regional reports note that educational attainment rates among Region 8 residents are slightly lower when compared to Michigan statewide averages: 38.1% of the region's population ages 25 and older had at most a high school diploma, a figure 2.2 percentage points higher than the statewide average (35.9%). This information is crucial in understanding education-related employment barriers within Region 8.

Disability

Per U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for the period 2020-2024 (Table ID S1810 – "Disability Characteristics"), an estimated 105,519 Region 8 residents (13.6% of the region's total civilian noninstitutionalized population) were categorized as being "with a disability." Looking at the prime working age population ages 18 to 64 specifically, 11.7% of the regional population was categorized as possessing a disclosed disability; the following is a list of disability rates for this cohort among Region 8's seven component counties:

- Berrien 12.0%
- Branch 14.5%

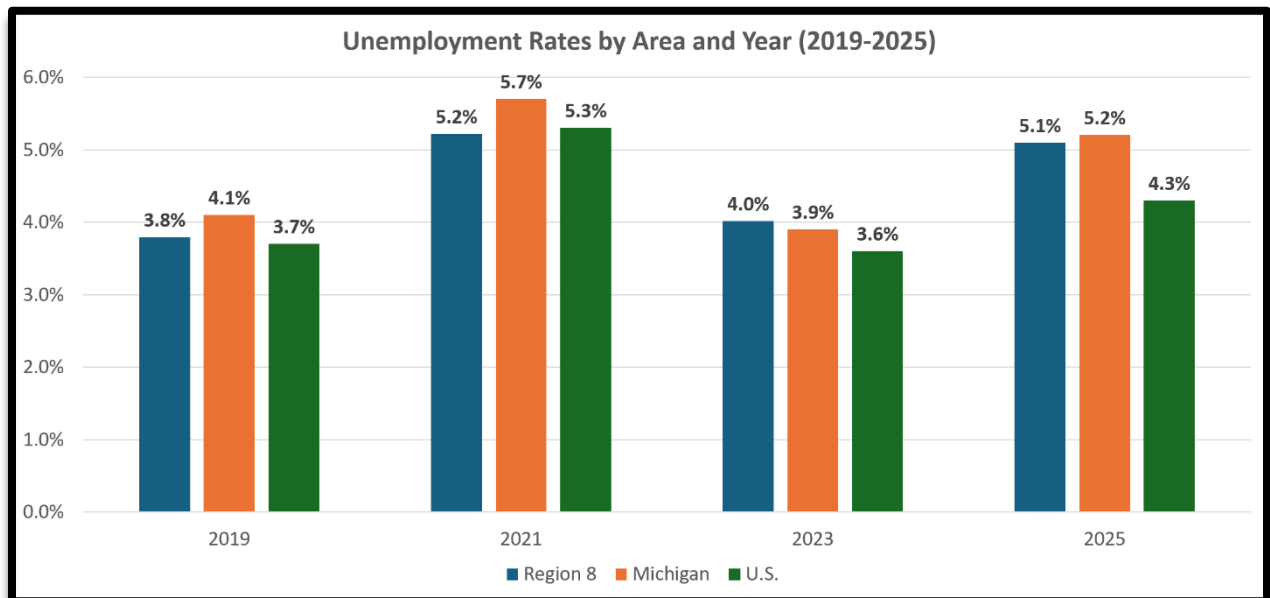
- Calhoun 13.0%
- Cass 14.6%
- Kalamazoo 9.9%
- St. Joseph 14.3%
- Van Buren 9.8%

It should be noted that this information reflects a slight decrease from data reported in the previous WIOA Regional (Region 8) Report. Both Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren and Michigan Works! Southwest actively work with employers and vocational rehabilitation partners, as described throughout this plan, to support barrier removal and provide workforce development services.

Unemployment

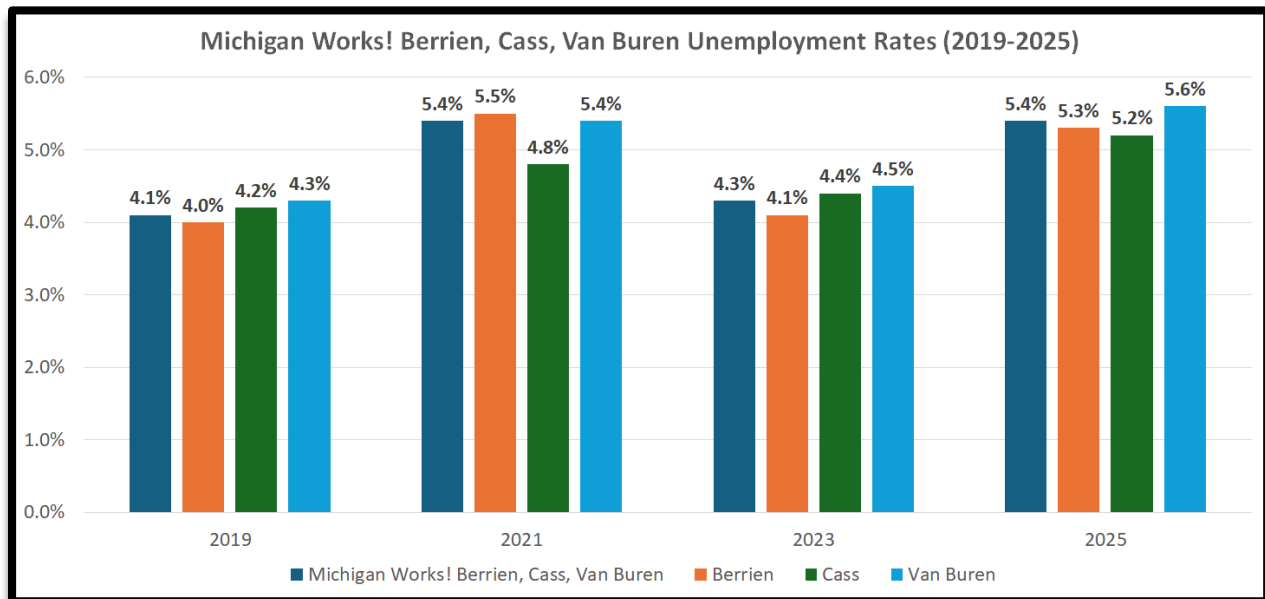
The following analysis reflects joblessness among the regional workforce over the period 2019-2025 using data sourced from the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#).

As the data show, regional, statewide, and national unemployment readings have followed broadly similar trajectories over the last five years, with unemployment rising between 2019-2021 amidst pandemic-related labor market upheaval, declining between 2021-2023 as the economy recovered, and then climbing anew between 2023-2025 against the backdrop of softening manufacturing demand and agentic AI adoption. There are now an estimated 20,111 unemployed individuals regionwide as of 2025, a 28.3% increase (+4,434) from 2023's annual total and 36.6% higher than the region's 2019 pre-pandemic unemployment baseline (14,718). Region 8's unemployment rate stood at 5.1% as of 2025, slightly lower than the statewide figure (5.2%) but nearly a full percentage point higher than the U.S. average (4.3%). The following visualization provides an overview of regional, statewide, and national unemployment rates over this period.

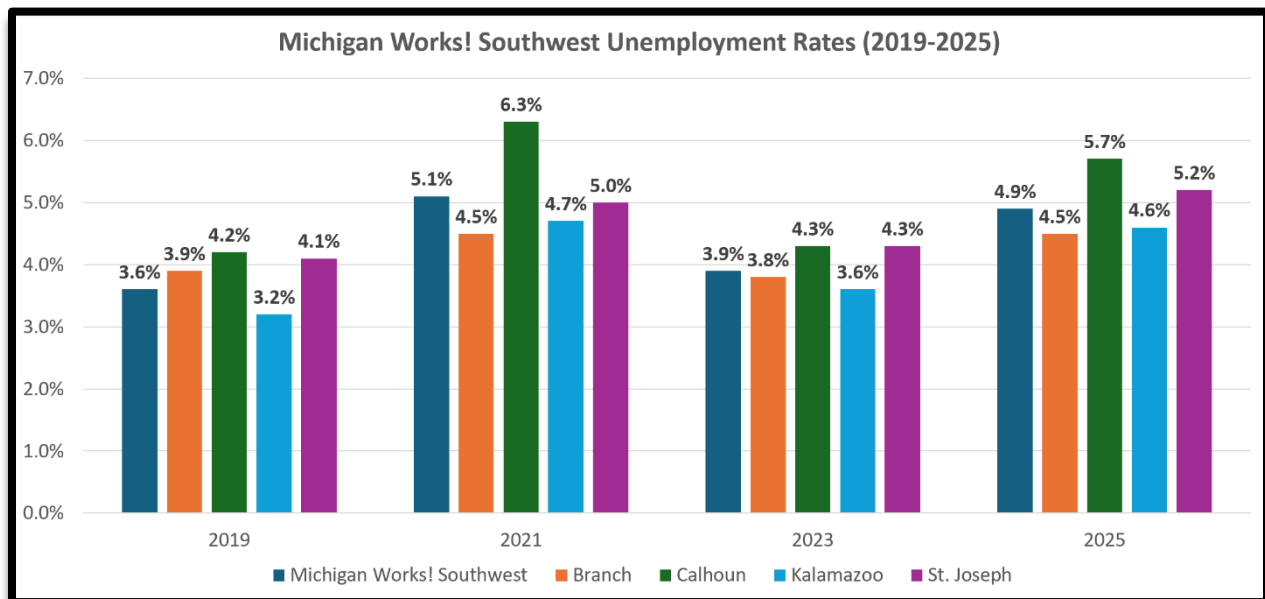


Source: Michigan Center for Data Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The following visualizations provide county-level overviews of regional unemployment rate trends over this same period in the Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren and Michigan Works! Southwest service areas. As of 2025, unemployment rates range from 5.2% (Cass County) to 5.6% (Van Buren County) in the MW! BCBV service area and from 4.5% (Branch County) to 5.7% (Calhoun County) in the MW! Southwest service area.

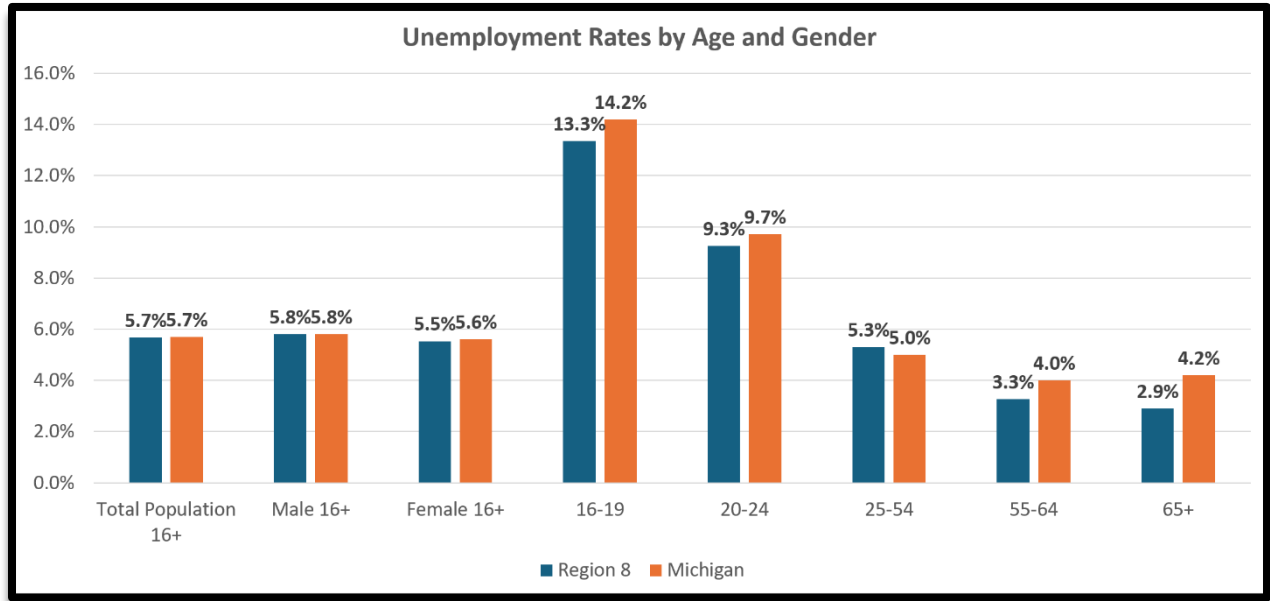


Source: Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

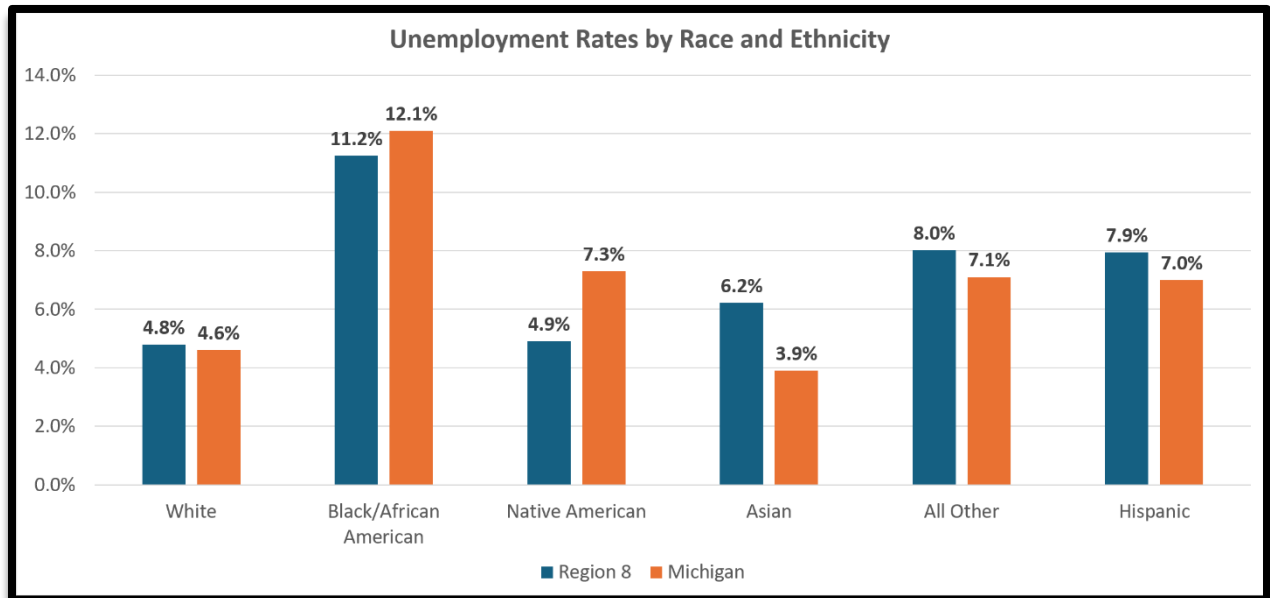


Source: Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The following charts reflect regional and statewide unemployment trends for specific demographic cohorts using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for the period 2020-2024, with the first chart breaking out this data on the basis of age and gender and the second providing a race and ethnicity-centered analysis. Looking at age-related data, the unemployment rate for Region 8’s prime working age population ages 25-54 (5.3%) slightly exceeds the Michigan average for the same cohort (5.0%). Racial and ethnic cohorts for which regional unemployment readings are appreciably higher than statewide averages include those categorized as “Asian,” “All Other,” “Hispanic,” and “White.”



Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau



Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

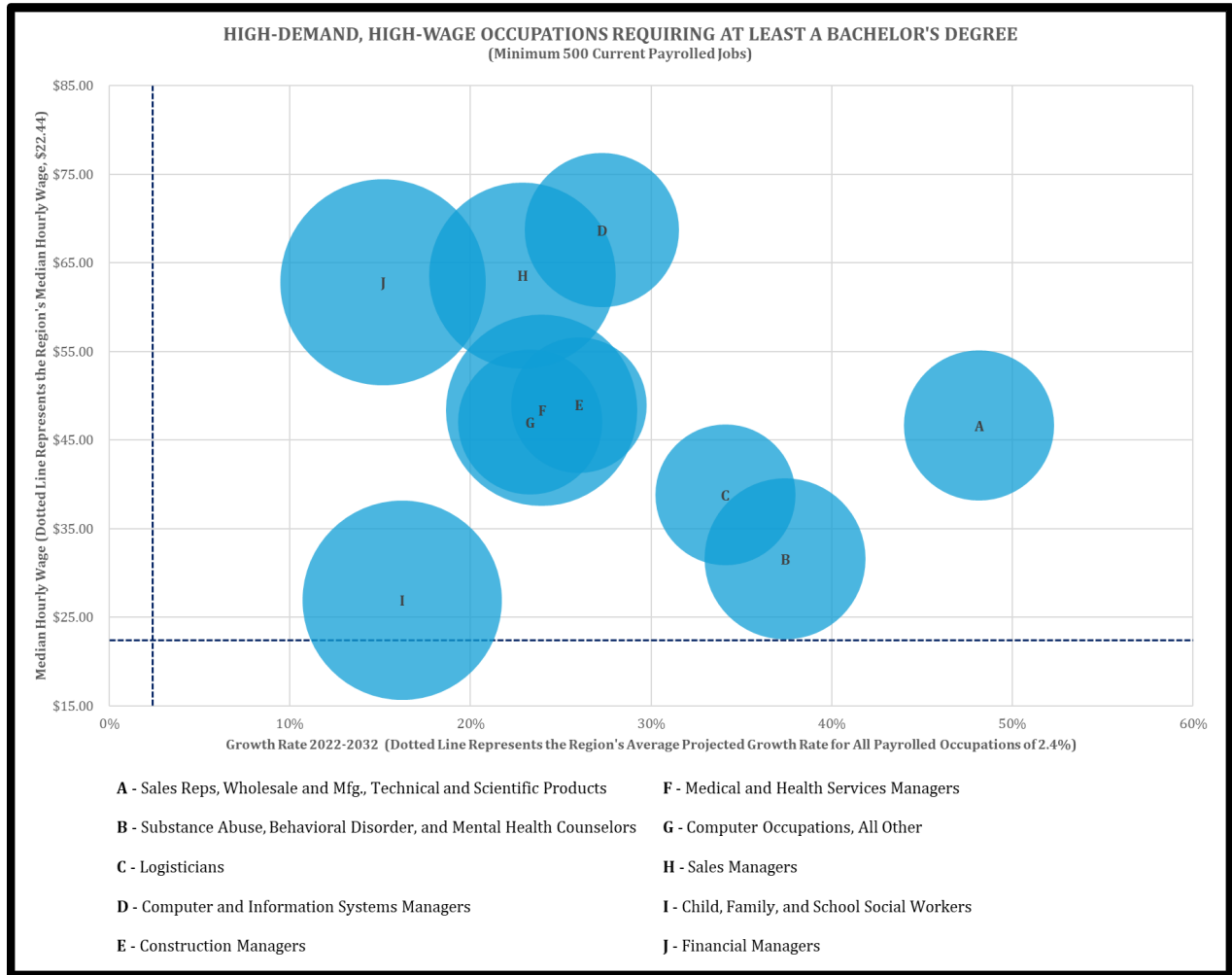
High-Demand, High-Wage Data

Lightcast [(2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>)] provides the following data regarding high-demand, high-wage occupations on the basis of typical educational and training requirements for Region 8. This analysis is critical to the work being done in collaboration with educational institutions, training providers, and employers throughout the seven counties, as well as with an increased focus on apprenticeships across the region and will assist as a tool in guiding conversation.

The following illustrations plot those occupations with the highest projected growth rates over the period 2022-2032 and with current median hourly earnings at or above the region's current median hourly wage for all occupations (\$22.44) on the basis of their typical educational and training requirements. In order to ensure that the data is meaningful for operational planning purposes, only those occupations with sufficiently large current regional employment footprints (i.e. a minimum of 200-500 current payrolled positions) were considered. The time range 2022-2032 was utilized in the analysis to ensure that employment growth projections are representative of organic job creation and not artifacts resulting from the region's 2020-2021 pandemic-era employment trough.

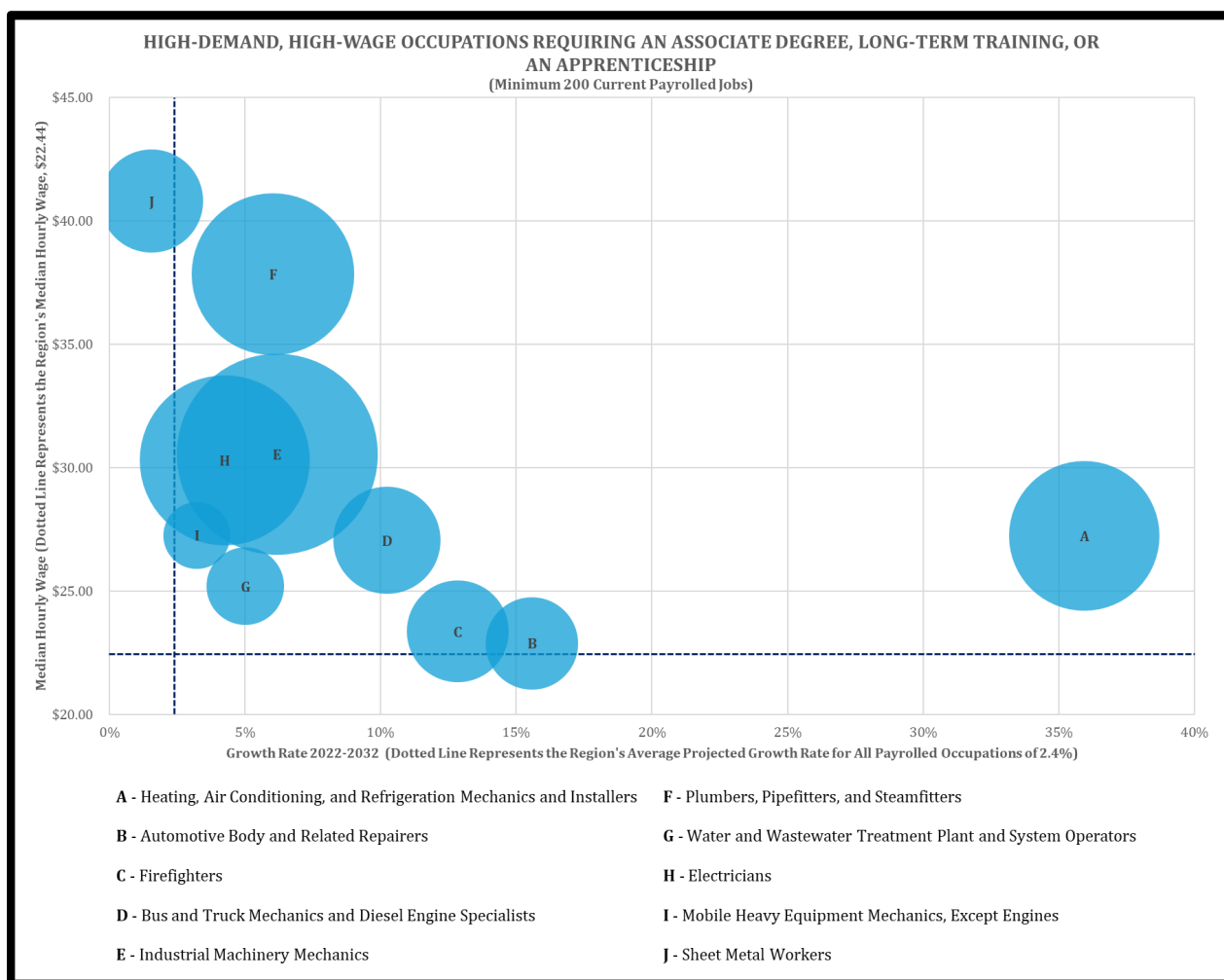
High-demand, high-wage occupations requiring at least a Bachelor's Degree

Among those occupations requiring at least a bachelor's degree which have both median hourly wages above the region's overall median for all occupation types and at least 500 current payrolled positions in-region, "Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products" is projected to see the highest relative growth over the period 2022-2032 (+48%).



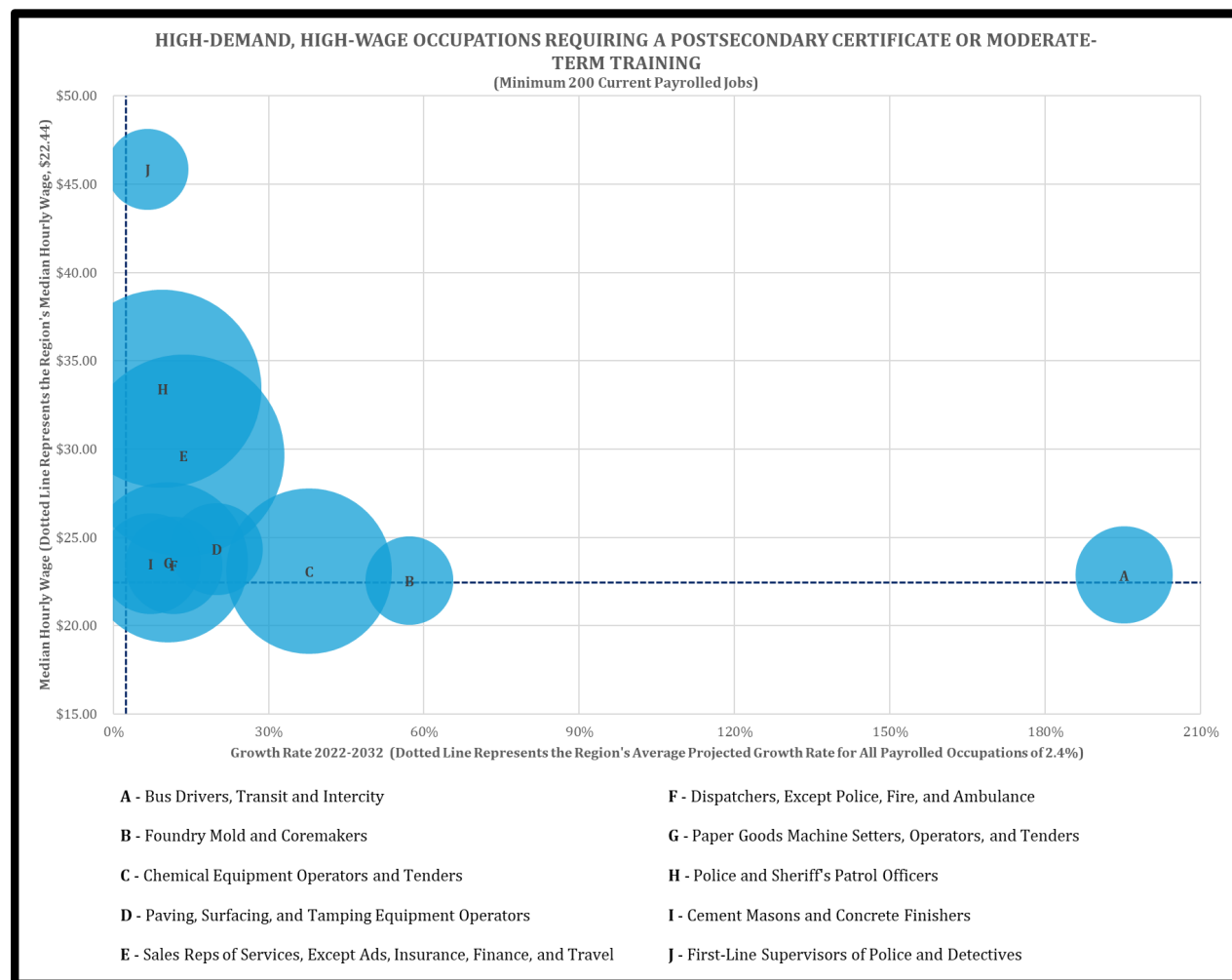
High-demand, high-wage occupations requiring an Associate Degree, long-term training, or an apprenticeship

Among those occupations requiring at least an associate degree, long-term training, or an apprenticeship which have both median hourly wages above the region's overall median for all occupation types and at least 200 current payrolled positions in-region, "Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers" is projected to see the highest relative growth rate over the period 2022-2032 (+36%).



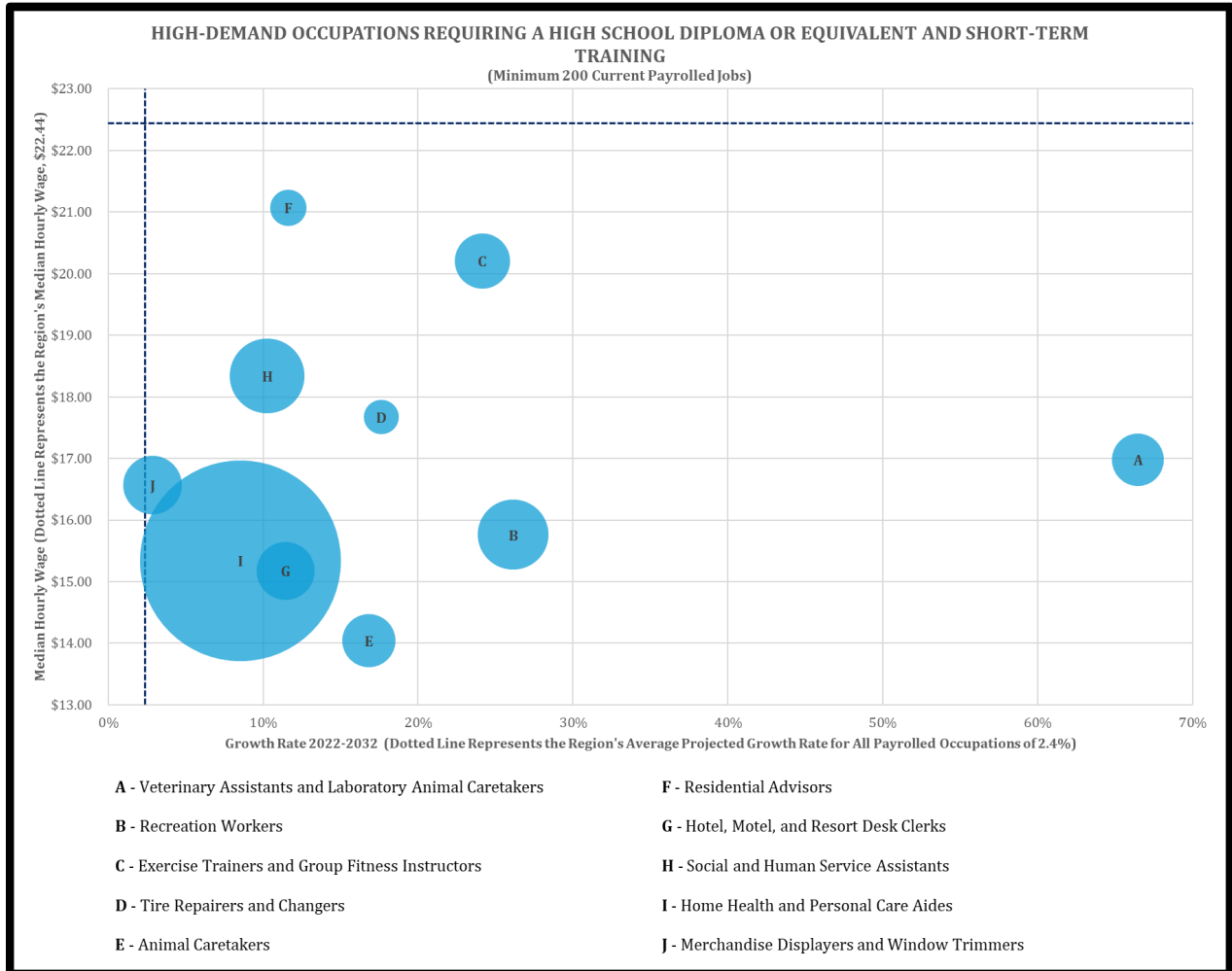
High-demand, high-wage occupations requiring a postsecondary certificate or moderate term training

Among those occupations requiring at least a postsecondary certificate or moderate-term training which have both median hourly wages above the region's overall median for all occupation types and at least 200 current payrolled positions in-region, "Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity" are projected to see the highest relative growth rate over the period 2022-2032 (+195%).



High-demand occupations requiring a high school diploma or equivalent and short-term training

Among those occupations requiring both a high school diploma or equivalent and short-term training and with at least 200 current payrolled positions in-region, “Veterinary Assistants and Laboratory Animal Caretakers” is projected to see the highest relative growth rate over the period 2022-2032 (+66%). Note, however, that the median wages for all ten occupations sit well below the region’s prevailing median wage for all occupations, emphasizing the importance of upskilling.



Occupation Growth

The following table provides an overview of year-on-year job growth in Region 8 over the period 2024-2025 by major occupational group. This data comes courtesy of Lightcast (2026) (*Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>) and includes only payrolled employees (both QCEW and non-QCEW) in the total employment counts.

Description	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 – 2025 Change	2024 - 2025 % Change
Management Occupations	20,340	20,359	18	0%
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	15,450	15,456	6	0%
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	4,831	4,794	-37	-1%
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	7,462	7,322	-140	-2%
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	3,390	3,350	-40	-1%
Community and Social Service Occupations	6,564	6,647	83	1%
Legal Occupations	1,036	1,044	8	1%
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	16,448	16,702	254	2%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	3,897	3,881	-16	0%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	18,401	18,575	173	1%
Healthcare Support Occupations	13,959	14,137	177	1%
Protective Service Occupations	5,537	5,501	-36	-1%
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	29,141	29,362	221	1%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	9,551	9,575	24	0%
Personal Care and Service Occupations	7,055	7,083	28	0%
Sales and Related Occupations	24,073	23,966	-106	0%
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	33,109	32,956	-153	0%

Description	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 – 2025 Change	2024 - 2025 % Change
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	4,268	4,175	-93	-2%
Construction and Extraction Occupations	10,268	10,198	-69	-1%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	13,584	13,642	57	0%
Production Occupations	41,611	41,035	-576	-1%
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	25,528	25,786	258	1%
Military-only Occupations	565	554	-12	-2%
Total, All Occupational Groups	316,069	316,099	30	0%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Most Competitive Occupations

The following table provides an overview of the region's payrolled employment composition on the basis of shift share using data from Lightcast (2026) (*Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>). Shift share is an indicator that shows which occupational types are competitive in the region and is comprised of four components:

- Occupational mix effect - the expected change in regional jobs based on national growth/decline in the industries that employ them.
- National growth effect - the expected change in regional jobs based on based on the growth of the overall U.S. economy.
- Expected change - the sum of the occupational mix effect and the national growth effect, this represents the expected change in regional jobs in a vacuum.
- Competitive effect - jobs added or lost beyond the expected change as a result of the region's unique characteristics.

Occupations with a positive competitive effect value are outperforming their national average and represent those jobs for which the region is currently a talent hub. Occupations with a negative competitive effect value are those that are underperforming their national average and represent those job types that are less suited for the regional economy as it currently stands.

Description	2024 - 2025 Change	Occ. Mix Effect	Nat'l Growth Effect	Expected Change	Competitive Effect
Management Occupations	18	39	65	105	-86
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	6	-9	50	40	-34
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	-37	-13	15	2	-39
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	-140	-5	24	19	-158
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	-40	7	11	18	-58
Community and Social Service Occupations	83	77	21	98	-15
Legal Occupations	8	5	3	9	0
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	254	76	53	129	125
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	-16	-31	12	-19	2
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	173	155	59	214	-41
Healthcare Support Occupations	177	301	45	346	-168
Protective Service Occupations	-36	18	18	36	-72
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	221	-70	93	24	198
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	24	16	31	47	-23
Personal Care and Service Occupations	28	39	23	62	-34
Sales and Related Occupations	-106	-168	77	-90	-16
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	-153	-271	106	-165	12
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	-93	-37	14	-24	-69
Construction and Extraction Occupations	-69	29	33	62	-131

Description	2024 - 2025 Change	Occ. Mix Effect	Nat'l Growth Effect	Expected Change	Competitive Effect
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	57	6	44	50	8
Production Occupations	-576	-412	133	-278	-298
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	258	-12	82	70	188
Military-only Occupations	-12	-3	2	-2	-10
Total, All Occupational Groups	30	-261	1,013	752	-722

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Sectors in Region 8

In order to most effectively serve both the employers and jobseekers of Region 8, an industry employment analysis was conducted to elucidate regional employment patterns and identify current in-demand sectors. The results of this analysis can be found in the following table, which provides an overview of year-on-year job growth in Region 8 over the period 2024-2025 by 2-digit NAICS sector. This data comes courtesy of Lightcast (2026) (*Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>) and includes only payrolled employees (both QCEW and non-QCEW) in the total sector employment counts.

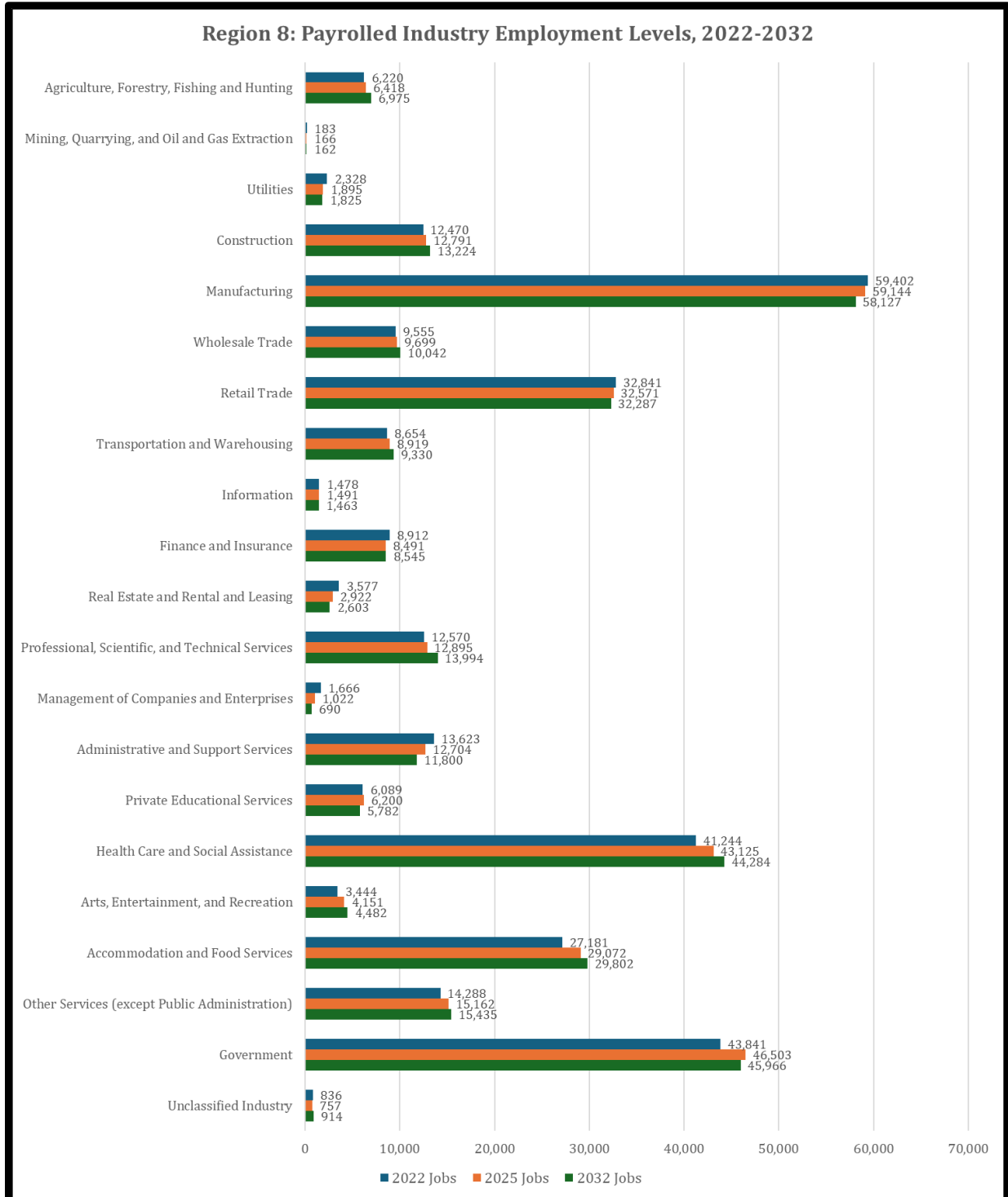
NAICS	Industry	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2024-2025)	% Change	2025 Earnings Per Worker
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	6,567	6,418	-149	-2%	\$51,461
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	179	166	-12	-7%	\$124,590
22	Utilities	1,893	1,895	2	0%	\$171,485
23	Construction	12,937	12,791	-146	-1%	\$88,485
31-33	Manufacturing	60,138	59,144	-993	-2%	\$103,943
42	Wholesale Trade	9,740	9,699	-40	0%	\$86,765
44-45	Retail Trade	32,722	32,571	-151	0%	\$45,656

NAICS	Industry	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2024-2025)	% Change	2025 Earnings Per Worker
48-49	Transportation and Warehousing	8,451	8,919	468	6%	\$78,012
51	Information	1,531	1,491	-40	-3%	\$86,668
52	Finance and Insurance	8,380	8,491	111	1%	\$107,115
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	2,915	2,922	6	0%	\$68,260
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	12,983	12,895	-88	-1%	\$107,710
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,086	1,022	-64	-6%	\$221,020
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	13,077	12,704	-373	-3%	\$58,484
61	Private Educational Services	6,047	6,200	153	3%	\$50,412
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	42,386	43,125	739	2%	\$76,199
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	4,056	4,151	95	2%	\$32,169
72	Accommodation and Food Services	28,872	29,072	201	1%	\$26,541
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	15,158	15,162	5	0%	\$43,705
90	Government	46,192	46,503	311	1%	\$83,576
99	Unclassified Industry	761	757	-3	0%	\$59,004
Total, All Sectors		316,069	316,099	30	0%	\$74,892

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Longitudinal Sector Employment Dynamics

In order to identify both the high-growth and declining sectors of Region 8, longitudinal payrolled employment shifts over the period 2022-2032 were analyzed on the basis of 2-digit NAICS sector; this timeframe was chosen in an attempt to minimize the effects of post-pandemic rebound hiring on the data. This information comes courtesy of Lightcast (2026) (*Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>).



Additional data sourced from Lightcast (Data Set 2026.1, accessed April 13, 2026) shows trends from the previous three-year period, inclusive of post-pandemic shifts, as well as projected future state data for the subsequent seven years which includes the balance of the Region 8 plan period.

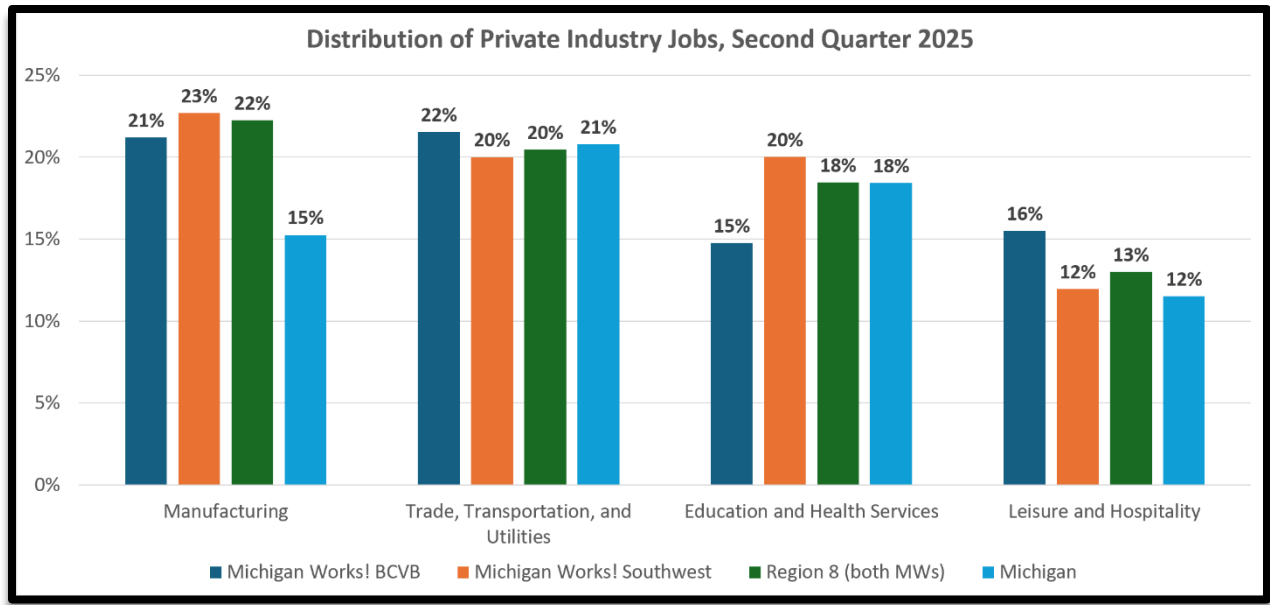
Industry	2022 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2032 Jobs	Change in Jobs 2022- 2025	% Change	Change in Jobs 2025- 2032	% Change	2025 Earnings Per Worker
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	6,220	6,418	6,975	198	3%	557	9%	\$51,461
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	183	166	162	-16	-9%	-5	-3%	\$124,590
Utilities	2,328	1,895	1,825	-432	-19%	-70	-4%	\$171,485
Construction	12,470	12,791	13,224	321	3%	433	3%	\$88,485
Manufacturing	59,402	59,144	58,127	-258	0%	-1,017	-2%	\$103,943
Wholesale Trade	9,555	9,699	10,042	144	2%	343	4%	\$86,765
Retail Trade	32,841	32,571	32,287	-270	-1%	-284	-1%	\$45,656
Transportation and Warehousing	8,654	8,919	9,330	266	3%	411	5%	\$78,012
Information	1,478	1,491	1,463	13	1%	-28	-2%	\$86,668
Finance and Insurance	8,912	8,491	8,545	-421	-5%	54	1%	\$107,115
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	3,577	2,922	2,603	-656	-18%	-318	-11%	\$68,260
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	12,570	12,895	13,994	325	3%	1,099	9%	\$107,710
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,666	1,022	690	-645	-39%	-331	-32%	\$221,020

Industry	2022 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2032 Jobs	Change in Jobs 2022- 2025	% Change	Change in Jobs 2025- 2032	% Change	2025 Earnings Per Worker
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	13,623	12,704	11,800	-919	-7%	-904	-7%	\$58,484
Private Educational Services	6,089	6,200	5,782	111	2%	-418	-7%	\$50,412
Health Care and Social Assistance	41,244	43,125	44,284	1,881	5%	1,159	3%	\$76,199
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	3,444	4,151	4,482	707	21%	331	8%	\$32,169
Accommodation and Food Services	27,181	29,072	29,802	1,891	7%	730	3%	\$26,541
Other Services (except Public Administration)	14,288	15,162	15,435	874	6%	273	2%	\$43,705
Government	43,841	46,503	45,966	2,662	6%	-537	-1%	\$83,576
Unclassified Industry	836	757	914	-79	-9%	157	21%	\$59,004
Total, All Industries	310,403	316,099	317,732	5,697	2%	1,633	1%	\$74,892

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Industry Specific Data for Region 8

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), the four supersectors responsible for the largest shares of private industry employment in Region 8 are (in order) “Manufacturing,” “Trade, Transportation, and Utilities,” “Education and Health Services,” and “Leisure and Hospitality.” These four supersectors accounted for 74% of Region 8’s private industry employment in the second quarter of 2025, a figure which is appreciably higher than their combined share at the Michigan statewide level (66%).



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Industry Data: Manufacturing

Remaining the largest industry since previous Region 8 planning, additional information by county regarding the “Manufacturing” sector in Region 8 is provided from Lightcast, below:

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024-2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	11,678	11,121	-557	-4.8%
Branch County, MI	3,719	3,770	51	1.4%
Calhoun County, MI	10,255	10,211	-44	-0.4%
Cass County, MI	2,030	2,022	-8	-0.4%
Kalamazoo County, MI	21,335	21,074	-262	-1.2%
St. Joseph County, MI	7,582	7,435	-147	-1.9%
Van Buren County, MI	3,537	3,511	-26	-0.7%
Total, Region 8	60,138	59,144	-994	-1.7%

Lightcast. (2026). Data Set 2026.1. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

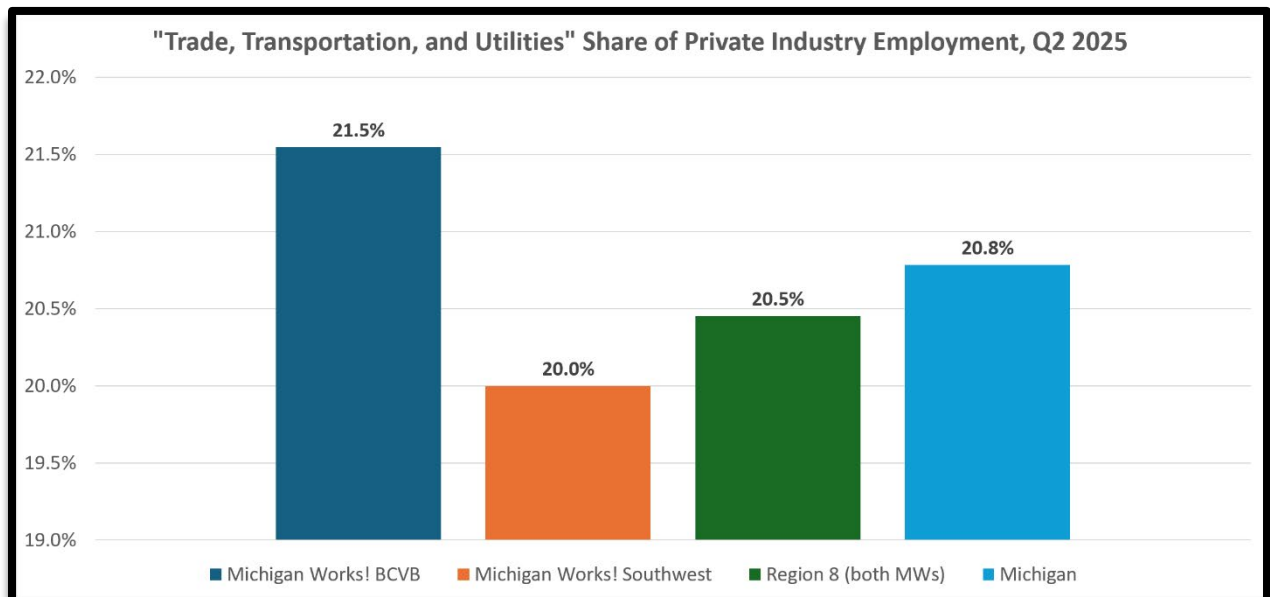
Average Earnings Per Job, “Manufacturing”:

County Name	2025 Earnings Per Worker
Berrien County	\$102,124
Branch County	\$77,669
Calhoun County	\$95,174
Cass County	\$73,029
Kalamazoo County	\$126,178
St. Joseph County	\$88,824
Van Buren County	\$79,792
	Average: \$103,943

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Industry Data: Trade, Transportation, and Utilities

The “Trade, Transportation, and Utilities” supersector employed 53,734 regionwide in Q2 2025, equivalent to 20.5% of Region 8’s private industry total. The supersector accounted for similar shares of private employment in the service areas of both MW! BCBV (21.5%) and MW! Southwest (20.0%).



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Additional information regarding the “Trade, Transportation and Utilities” supersector in Region 8 comes courtesy of Lightcast and is provided below:

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024-2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	10,869	11,088	219	2.0%
Branch County, MI	3,978	3,896	-81	-2.0%
Calhoun County, MI	8,856	8,874	18	0.2%
Cass County, MI	1,484	1,472	-12	-0.8%
Kalamazoo County, MI	21,073	21,295	222	1.1%
St. Joseph County, MI	3,128	3,085	-44	-1.4%
Van Buren County, MI	3,418	3,375	-43	-1.3%
Total, Region 8	52,806	53,085	279	0.5%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Average Earnings Per Job, “Trade, Transportation, and Utilities”:

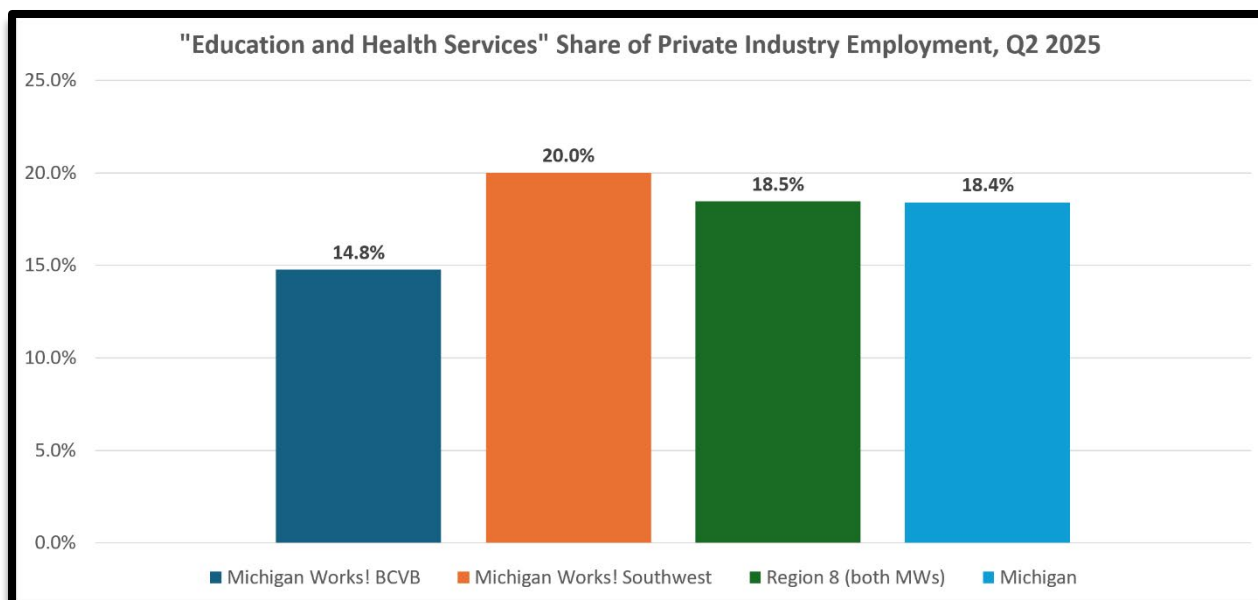
County Name	2025 Earnings Per Worker
Berrien County	\$65,193
Branch County	\$69,106
Calhoun County	\$65,597
Cass County	\$69,543
Kalamazoo County	\$63,279
St. Joseph County	\$51,969
Van Buren County	\$48,900
	Average: \$63,096

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Industry Data: Health Care and Social Assistance

As previously reported in the 2020-2023 Region 8 plan, long term projections of the Healthcare industry were expected to experience the most growth for both the Southwest Region and all of Michigan. The Southwest region was projected to grow by 0.1 percent in total jobs by 2028. While some of the region's occupational groups will experience loss, Healthcare was projected to grow by 5.3 percent (1,600 jobs).

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), the "Education and Health Services" supersector accounted for 48,521 jobs regionwide in the second quarter of 2025, a figure equivalent to 18.5% of Region 8's private industry total. The supersector was the second-largest employer in Michigan Works! Southwest's service area in Q2 2025 (37,147 jobs, 20.0% of private industry total) and the fourth-largest employer in the service area of Michigan Works! BCBV (11,374 jobs, 14.8% of private industry total).



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Additional information regarding the "Health Care and Social Assistance" sector in Region 8 is provided from Lightcast below.

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 - 2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	8,111	8,173	62	0.8%
Branch County, MI	857	857	0	0.0%
Calhoun County, MI	8,644	8,866	222	2.6%

Cass County, MI	397	412	14	3.7%
Kalamazoo County, MI	20,668	21,102	434	2.1%
St. Joseph County, MI	2,299	2,296	-4	-0.2%
Van Buren County, MI	1,410	1,419	9	0.7%
Region 8	42,386	43,125	739	1.7%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Average Earnings Per Job, “Health Care and Social Assistance”:

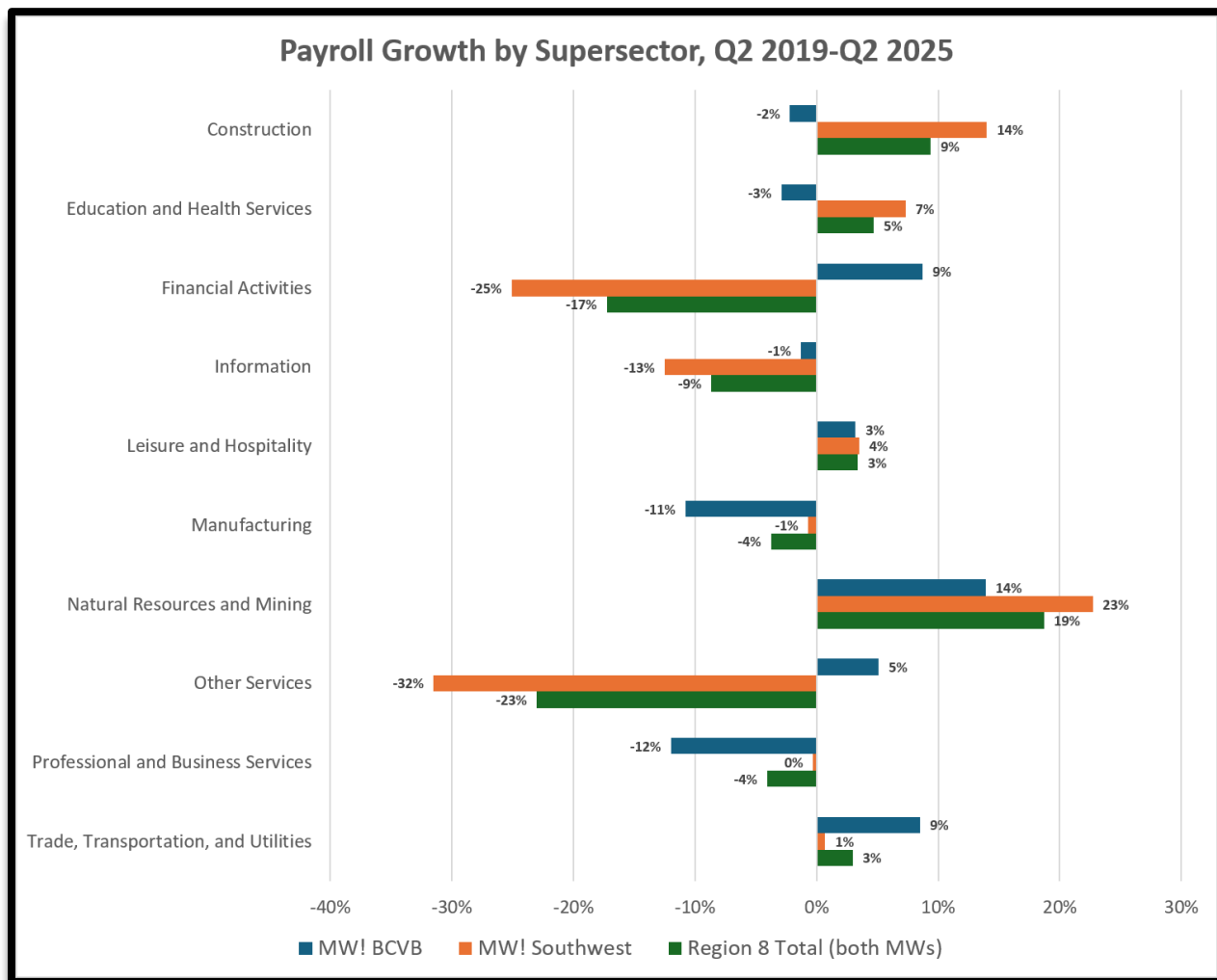
County Name	2025 Earnings Per Job
Berrien County	\$71,053
Branch County	\$53,346
Calhoun County	\$71,987
Cass County	\$85,722
Kalamazoo County	\$85,449
St. Joseph County	\$46,245
Van Buren County	\$54,095
	Average: \$76,199

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Industry Data: Information Technology/Information Security/Telecommunications

The information technology/information security/telecommunications industry in Michigan’s Region 8 is a focus area for the Michigan Works! agencies, and a continued analysis of the increase in automation and electric vehicles is also a focus.

Per the 2026 Annual Planning Information and Workforce Analysis Reports for [Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren](#) and [Michigan Works! Southwest](#), five of Region 8’s ten private supersectors registered payroll contraction over the period Q2 2019-Q2 2025, with “Information” being among those to post a loss (-142 jobs, -8.7%). The following chart provides an overview of private industry employment shifts by supersector in Region 8 over this five-year period for both component MW service areas and the region as a whole.



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Despite a perception of technology and information-related industries as having workforces that trend younger, 27% of this industry cluster’s workforce is age 55 or older, making this a key factor for continued analysis. While this is likely indicative of the advanced levels of education required for those employed within this industry cluster, these indicators spell out current and upcoming worker and talent shortages that will require innovative talent pipeline strategies across Region 8.

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works Southwest have been and will continue to work with employers in this industry to identify workforce needs. Training providers and apprenticeship programs are being considered to attract a younger workforce to the industry.

Additional information regarding the “Information” sector in Region 8 is provided from Lightcast below.

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 - 2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	393	406	13	3.3%
Branch County, MI	85	87	2	2.0%
Calhoun County, MI	182	176	-6	-3.4%
Cass County, MI	16	17	1	4.2%
Kalamazoo County, MI	705	675	-30	-4.3%
St. Joseph County, MI	40	42	2	3.8%
Van Buren County, MI	109	89	-21	-19.0%
Region 8	1,531	1,491	-40	-2.6%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Average Earnings Per Job, “Information”:

County Name	2025 Earnings Per Job
Berrien County	\$72,417
Branch County	\$68,778
Calhoun County	\$56,474
Cass County	\$136,056
Kalamazoo County	\$89,439
St. Joseph County	\$87,046
Van Buren County	\$199,022
	Average: \$86,668

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Industry Data: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting

In 2025, the “Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting” sector in Michigan’s Prosperity Region 8 employed 6,418 people, a 2.3% decrease (-149 jobs) from the previous year. Cass County was the lone county to register over-the-year payroll growth (+7 jobs, +2.7%), while Berrien County experienced the most significant payroll contraction (-51 jobs, -3.9%).

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 – 2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	1,306	1,255	-51	-3.9%
Branch County, MI	271	259	-12	-4.4%

Calhoun County, MI	794	752	-42	-5.3%
Cass County, MI	270	277	7	2.7%
Kalamazoo County, MI	1,610	1,594	-16	-1.0%
St. Joseph County, MI	901	866	-34	-3.8%
Van Buren County, MI	1,416	1,415	-2	-0.1%
Region 8	6,567	6,418	-149	-2.3%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

The average earnings per job for the sector stood at \$51,461 as of 2025. St. Joseph County had the highest average wage among Region 8's seven counties (\$69,580), while Berrien County had the lowest (\$37,514).

Average Earnings Per Job, "Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting":

County Name	2025 Earnings Per Job
Berrien County	\$37,514
Branch County	\$61,312
Calhoun County	\$51,799
Cass County	\$55,565
Kalamazoo County	\$55,362
St. Joseph County	\$69,580
Van Buren County	\$45,556
	Average: \$51,461

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Other Industries

Per previous Region 8 planning, the services sector, including "Accommodation and Food Services," was projected to hold the largest distribution of jobs by 2028 in Southwest Michigan, exactly 2.0 percentage points greater than the statewide average. Payrolls in Region 8's "Accommodation and Food Services" sector expanded by 0.7% over the period 2024 – 2025 with the creation of 201 new jobs regionwide.

Additional information regarding Region 8's "Accommodation and Food Services" sector is provided below courtesy of Lightcast.

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 - 2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	6,833	6,884	51	0.7%
Branch County, MI	1,618	1,627	10	0.6%
Calhoun County, MI	4,301	4,444	143	3.3%
Cass County, MI	1,164	1,173	9	0.8%
Kalamazoo County, MI	11,134	11,157	23	0.2%
St. Joseph County, MI	1,607	1,622	15	0.9%
Van Buren County, MI	2,215	2,165	-50	-2.3%
Region 8	28,872	29,072	200	0.7%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Average Earnings Per Job, “Accommodation and Food Services”:

County Name	2025 Earnings Per Job
Berrien County	\$27,302
Branch County	\$23,599
Calhoun County	\$27,303
Cass County	\$21,587
Kalamazoo County	\$27,374
St. Joseph County	\$22,881
Van Buren County	\$25,905
	Average: \$26,541

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Additionally, as reported in previous Region 8 planning, the only two industry sectors to show growth were Construction (2,000 jobs) and Education and Health Services (1,200 jobs). The construction industry’s workforce is aging rapidly, with 23% of the workforce being 55 years of age or older. This indicator continues to highlight the fact that near future talent shortages will require innovative talent pipeline strategies throughout Region 8.

Additional information regarding the “Construction” sector in Region 8 is provided below courtesy of Lightcast.

County Name	2024 Jobs	2025 Jobs	2024 - 2025 Change	% Change
Berrien County, MI	2,029	1,981	-47	-2.3%
Branch County, MI	499	513	15	2.9%
Calhoun County, MI	1,876	1,918	42	2.2%
Cass County, MI	371	382	11	3.0%
Kalamazoo County, MI	6,688	6,516	-172	-2.6%
St. Joseph County, MI	761	728	-33	-4.3%
Van Buren County, MI	713	751	39	5.5%
Region 8	12,937	12,791	-146	-1.1%

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Average Earnings Per Job, “Construction”:

County Name	2025 Earnings Per Job
Berrien County	\$79,945
Branch County	\$64,940
Calhoun County	\$91,082
Cass County	\$70,644
Kalamazoo County	\$95,354
St. Joseph County	\$87,716
Van Buren County	\$70,719
	Average: \$88,485

Lightcast. (2026). *Data Set 2026.1*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from <https://lightcast.io/>.

Skills

The occupations described above all require a solid foundation in basic skills, such as reading, communication, math, and cognitive abilities that influence the acquisition and application of knowledge in problem solving. Most require active learning and critical thinking skills. In addition, these occupations require workers to possess technical skills and knowledge related to their specific occupational discipline and to master certain tools and technologies to achieve particular certifications.

Soft skills are overwhelmingly the most highly sought after “skill” by employers in Region 8. Employers struggle to find employees with the required technical skills as well as those with soft skills, such as attendance, work ethic, problem solving, time management and teamwork.

Post-Secondary Education

Both MWAs of Region 8 fully support the current and future workforce educational success, including the attainment of a postsecondary degree or credential, in alignment with the Governor’s 60% by 2030 goal. BCVB Michigan Works! and MWSW will seek opportunities that allow residents of Southwest Michigan greater access to education, including outreach to connect young adults to programs such as Michigan’s Reconnect which offers tuition assistance through the State of Michigan.

Another option for post-secondary skill development, registered apprenticeship, is already actively promoted throughout Region 8. BCVB and MWSW Apprenticeship Success Coordinators (ASCs) assist employers in the establishment of apprenticeship programs, provide support for new and existing employees interested in training that includes both paid on-the-job training (OJT) with Related Training Instruction (RTI/classroom instruction). Additionally, ASCs bridge the gap between educational/training institutions and employers, through communication with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Office of Apprenticeship. During the term of this plan, the Michigan Works! Agencies in Region 8 will continue to strategically assist employers, through the promotion and coordination of available funding, the RA model to expand opportunities in our state, as well as champion efforts to reach rural and underserved populations, to promote inclusion and close equity gaps.

English Language Learners

As described throughout the Region 8 WIOA Regional and WIOA Local Plans for BCVB Michigan Works! And MWSW, the Michigan Works! Agencies continue the critical work of adapting employer and job seeker needs, including the needs of English Language Learners (those whose primary language is not English, or whose community speaks a dominant language other than English) within Region 8. Ongoing support of the career development needs of English Language Learners specifically for in-demand industries and occupations, is a priority of Region 8. The Business Solutions teams of both Michigan Works! Agencies work diligently to engage employers in the hiring and promotion of the population of English Language Learners throughout Southwest Michigan.

Assisting with the integration of English Language Learners into the workforce, while working collaboratively with businesses to meet current and future talent needs, and exploring opportunities with economic development and training partners to achieve this successful integration will take precedence during the term of this plan.

Individuals with Barriers

Individuals with barriers to employment continue to be a focus for the MWAs in Region 8 as there is continued focus on assisting individuals with barriers to obtaining and retaining meaningful

employment, including transportation, both within county lines, as well as across county lines; childcare and access to childcare, specifically on shifts other than first shift; and housing. Affordable housing throughout the region remains an issue for individuals and their families.

To address these issues, Berrien, Cass, Van Buren Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest have utilized local Workforce Development Boards and community collaborations and partnerships throughout the Region and State to focus on working with partners in developing innovative and practical solutions to address issues related to housing, transportation and childcare which will ultimately result in better opportunities for individuals to obtain meaningful and sustainable employment.

ALICE Population

Serving the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population in Region 8 requires a comprehensive approach tailored to the unique challenges and needs of this demographic. Access to training and education, along with barrier removal, is critical to support the ALICE population to secure a wage that supports economic self-sufficiency. Addressing the needs of the ALICE population in Region 8 requires a multi-faceted approach that combines immediate support with long-term solutions. By focusing on employment and barrier removal, such as housing, healthcare, education, food security, and transportation, we create a supportive environment that enables families to thrive. Collaboration between government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and the community will support these efforts.

Strengths

Specifically, this Plan highlights a variety of innovative approaches to workforce development activities that the Michigan Works! Agencies in Region 8 have implemented in conjunction with training institutions, employers and community partners to address the needs of employers and job seekers, including employer consortiums, customized training opportunities and implementation of sector strategies. In alignment with the State Workforce Plan, this Region 8 plan is responsive to the needs of business, focusing on the education and credential attainment of the future workforce, as well as the re-skilling of the current workforce. These activities are implemented in ways that address the needs of individuals with barriers to employment and retention, as well as meeting the employment needs of employers in the region.

In addition, as discussed throughout this Plan, the Michigan Works! Business Solutions Teams in Region 8 utilize the Business Solutions Model to deliver a coordinated, systematic, team approach to business outreach and engagement, resulting in quality employer relationships that expand opportunities throughout the region.

Weaknesses

There remains opportunity throughout Region 8 to expand the work of existing employer consortium groups, as well as the development and implementation of additional employer consortiums.

With the increasing demands for an IT workforce, BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest are partnering with employers to identify non-traditional apprenticeship programs to fill the workforce needs in the IT industry. Strengthening the work of the Advanced IT Solutions Consortium, focused on the rapidly evolving Electric Vehicle (EV) industry, will be essential over the next four years. BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest will discuss the needs of the EV industry with employers, to increase collaboration and diversification into this sector. This will lead to a better workforce pipeline for employers in Region 8.

3. Regional Service Strategies

Numerous regional service strategies have been established, and will continue to be enhanced, through the use of a coordinated regional data analysis and ongoing collaboration.

Equity

The Michigan Works! Agencies in Region 8 are committed to equity in every aspect of our work, holding strict diversity, equity, and inclusion policies, and implementing equitable service delivery practices, to ensure that all individuals are provided access to high quality services. To help decrease and eliminate barrier to individuals most in need of workforce programs, the Michigan Works! Agencies deliver services virtually, as appropriate. Further, to eliminate barriers to accessibility, WIOA and other programs are made available within organizations located in underserved communities. With a focus on serving the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups in Region 8, both BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest hold ourselves accountable for creating a culture that results in high quality service delivery to all communities and community members.

Business Solutions Teams

The Certified Business Solutions Professional (CBSP) approach is used across Southwest Michigan to engage employers throughout Region 8. The Business Solutions lead staff in the region work hand-in-hand with community stakeholders, including area business networks, educational and training partners, and economic development organizations, to meet the current and future needs of both employers and job seekers. By leveraging these partnerships to support and build connections between business, workforce development, educators and economic developers in Region 8, CBSPs assist in the success of local employers utilizing a demand-driven approach with solutions that fit the specific needs of the workforce and expand local employment opportunities.

With a vision for dedicating focus on the growth and sustainability of businesses in Region 8, the Business Solutions Teams are fully equipped with the understanding of supply and demand, as it applies to local industries, strengthening the abilities of BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest to provide excellent customer service for job seekers. Armed with the critical knowledge of labor market data, CBSPs provide strategic support to the training and hiring of local employers, addressing the quantity of available positions to the number of work eligible individuals,

while assuring that the needs of local business are being met. Additionally, by utilizing local industry consortiums and local labor market data, the Business Solutions Teams are able to provide job seekers with access to training and targeted job placement strategies that assist local families in achieving and maintaining financial self-sufficiency, growing the middle class. The establishment of robust Business Solutions Teams (BST) has been a key strategy in implementing the demand-driven model across Region 8. The BST concept has three key features:

1. A focus on business as the driver and primary customer;
2. A team of workforce development professionals specifically trained for and committed to developing relationships with businesses; and
3. An understanding of the value of strategic collaborations with regional economic development and education partners to provide business solutions and the role of BST in these partnerships.

The BST concept also calls for a coordinated, systematic, team approach to business outreach and engagement. Regionally the work of the Business Solutions Teams includes, but is not limited to:

- Outreach and recruitment assistance;
- Application screening;
- Job postings on Pure Michigan Talent Connect (PMTCT);
- Facilitation and support of local and regional hiring events and job fairs for all job seekers;
- Attraction and retention assistance in partnership with economic development partners;
- Training and funding opportunities for new and incumbent workers, including connecting the unemployed with work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities throughout Region 8;
- Work with educators and employers to understand and improve opportunities for hard-to-serve populations, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, and youth;
- Facilitating connections between employers and education institutions;
- Utilizing a multi-generational approach, including addressing talent gaps between generations, to address the ever-changing workforce;
- Using data to inform decision making;
- Serving the needs of the ALICE population;
- Providing career exploration events for students and job seekers;
- Assisting employers with the development and growth of apprenticeship programs; and
- Support of industry specific consortia work throughout Region 8.

To support the work of the Business Solutions Teams throughout Region 8, Business Solutions staff engage with a variety of key partners including the following:

- Education and training providers,
- Vocational rehabilitation partners,
- Veteran Services partners,
- Economic development organizations,
- Business management consultants,
- Area Chambers of Commerce,
- Community-based organizations,

- Local units of government,
- Organized labor unions,
- Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, State of Michigan,
- Other state agencies, including Department of Agriculture, Department of Corrections, Department of Education,
- United States Department of Labor, and
- BSPs from other Michigan Works! areas outside of Region 8.

Additionally, Pure Michigan Talent Connect is utilized by all program staff as well as the Business Solutions Team to assist employers and job seekers. Talent Connect provides strategic tools via a web-based portal, allowing employers to identify and develop their talent base while also giving job seekers the opportunity to create a personalized plan to assist them more effectively in navigating their career decisions.

Entrepreneurship

Enhanced through the strong relationships between the Business Solutions Team and area employers, the Michigan Works! Agencies of Region 8 provides resources to aspiring entrepreneurs, including workshops and referrals to partner agencies to assist in business start up and training, business plan writing, and access to capital and financial preparation.

Youth Services

Region 8 has a comprehensive outreach and recruitment process designed to engage eligible in school youth 14 through 21 years old, and out of school youth 16 through 24 years of age, with individualized service strategies unique to the differing needs of youth/young adults. WIOA Youth Services provide services to all communities across the region. To ensure that potential customers will be aware of the breadth of services available to them, a multi-faceted, flexible, and customized outreach and recruitment process supports WIOA Youth activities, ensuring that both BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest maintains a youth-friendly intake environment, welcoming and easy to access, and provides potential participants with flexible times and locations for intakes. Utilizing an easy to navigate enrollment process and supporting WIOA Youth services through the leveraging additional funding sources, is a priority in Region 8.

Jobs for Michigan Graduates

Under the leadership of Youth Solutions, in partnership with BCVB Michigan Works!, Michigan Works! Southwest actively participates in Jobs for Michigan Graduates (JMG) programming, as an affiliate to assist in raising the high school graduation rate across the region, supporting the State of Michigan's 60% by 2030 goal. JMG programs strive for this goal by expanding mentoring, job readiness, leadership development, and other academic support for students either at risk of dropping out or those who have already dropped out. BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest actively partner with Youth Solutions in their mission to equip young people with the skills to overcome barriers and succeed in education, employment, and life.

Youth Outreach and Recruitment

Comprehensive outreach and recruitment processes have been designed to engage eligible and suitable youth from all communities across the region for WIOA Youth Services. In order to ensure that potential customers will be aware of the breadth of services available to them, a multi-faceted, flexible, and customized outreach and recruitment process has been designed to support both in-school and out-of-school activities; and those individuals will have every opportunity to connect with services.

Outreach and recruitment opportunities are facilitated through:

- maintaining a youth-friendly intake environment;
- maintaining welcoming and easy to access facilities;
- providing potential participants with flexible times and locations for intakes;
- utilizing an easy to navigate and streamlined enrollment procedure, and
- personalizing and customizing the recruitment process.

Veterans Services

There are a variety of services provided by the employment service professionals to assist eligible veterans and spouses to reduce and/or eliminate barriers to employment. Services include, but are not limited to:

Comprehensive assessment interviews,

- Career guidance services,
- Individual Employment Plans (IEPs),
- Staff-assisted job search activities,
- Provision of Labor Market Information (LMI), and
- Basic staff-assisted career services.

Veterans Career Advisors

Veterans Career Advisors are State of Michigan employees who provide intensive, individualized services to meet the employment needs of eligible veterans and spouses with significant barriers to employment.

Per LEO, the responsibilities of the Veterans Career Advisors include case management, outreach services to veterans, and group job counseling, which differs from licensed counseling. Veterans Career Advisors seek to establish a strong rapport and relationship with the veterans they serve, to provide the best services possible to help them reach their employment goals.

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest complies with the Jobs for Veterans Act by giving veterans and eligible spouses priority of service status for all programs and services.

Veteran Engagement Team of Southwest Michigan

The Veteran Engagement Team of Southwest Michigan (VETSWM) formerly known as Region 8 Veteran Community Action Team (R8VCAT) includes representatives from federal, state, local and faith-based organizations that support veterans in the communities where they live and work. The

Veterans Engagement Team focuses on identifying solutions for gaps in veteran services, reducing duplication of efforts and simplifying connections with local resources. This community-based system of care allows networks of service providers to employ best practices, share information and tools and connect more quickly with veterans. BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest will continue to develop this partnership and assist in this collaborative approach to assisting veterans in Southwest Michigan.

Offender Success

The mission of Offender Success, funded through the Michigan Department of Corrections, is to enhance public safety by reducing offender recidivism through a seamless plan of services and supervision, delivered through state and local collaboration. The plan developed with each returning citizen begins at the time of his or her exit from the prison system and reintegration into the community through the use of parole and Offender Success services. Positive reentry of individuals in Region 8 will rely on cross- county collaboration and leveraging of resources to guarantee employment placement and successful transition back into the communities throughout the region.

Offender Success is operated by BCVB Michigan Works! in Region 8. In partnership, Michigan Works! Southwest staff attend the Offender Success Transition Team meetings in Kalamazoo County to provide job leads, workshop schedules, and information on other workforce development resources provided in the Michigan Works! Southwest area.

Other Regional Partnerships

Through intentional efforts, positive and cooperative relationships with state agencies, at the local level, including the Unemployment Insurance Agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, the Department of Education, and others, have resulted in business customers and job seekers receiving unduplicated, coordinated services. BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest work collaboratively with the numerous agencies throughout Region 8 with a goal of inclusion and universal access.

These agencies include:

- **Disability Network of Southwest Michigan** is an organization dedicated to educating and connecting people with disabilities to resources while advocating for social change. The vision of the organization is a fully accessible community where disability is valued as human diversity. Their mission is to advance justice, access, and inclusion for the Disability Community. They also assist organizations, businesses, and government agencies to understand their rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They provide workshops and onsite training, technical assistance and support in learning to be welcoming of people with disabilities as customers, clients, patrons, volunteers, or employees. Their goal as a disability rights advocate is to protect the civil and human rights

of individuals with disabilities, and make sure that the laws put in place to protect them are vigorously enforced.

- The **Migrant Seasonal Farmworker program** is a federal initiative in the United States designed to support migrant and seasonal agricultural workers. The program aims to address the unique challenges faced by these workers, including employment, education, health, and housing. Specifically, the objectives of the MSFW program are as follows:
 - Provide job placement, training, and career development opportunities to improve the employment prospects of migrant and seasonal farm workers;
 - Offer educational programs and vocational training to enhance skills and increase job opportunities;
 - Address health concerns and ensure safe working conditions for farm workers. Support access to decent and affordable housing; and
 - Provide legal assistance and advocacy to protect workers' rights.
- **Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)** is a statewide network of vocational rehabilitation (VR) professionals developing creative, customized solutions that meet the needs of individuals and business. The organizations' vocational rehabilitation services for eligible individuals with disabilities, consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, help them to prepare for and engage in employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Using a dual customer approach, the subject matter experts of Business Relations Consultants, Rehabilitation Specialists and Occupational Therapists of the MRS's Business Services Division serve individuals along with the business customer. Their mission is to develop customized workforce solutions for businesses and individuals with disabilities, envisioning a diverse and inclusive workforce that unites businesses and individuals with disabilities toward a common good.

- **Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP)** is an organization committed to providing opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve employment, and/or achieve maximum and meaningful independence in life through comprehensive rehabilitative services. In addition, the BSBP Training Centers (one of which is located in Kalamazoo County) provides training and services that empower residents of the State of Michigan experiencing vision loss or impairment to achieve their individual goals. BSBP provides vocational skills training to aid in finding a job and training in daily living skills for State of Michigan residents living without vision.
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** is an organization that provides free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act legislation to individuals and employers. JAN provides individualized consultation to assist employers and their representatives seeking guidance on practical ways to engage in the interactive process, provide job accommodation solutions, and comply with Title I of the ADA; individuals with health conditions and disabilities seeking information about job accommodation solutions, employment rights under the ADA, and self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities; and family members and rehabilitation, medical, educational, and other professionals in their effort to support successful employment outcomes for individuals with health conditions and disabilities.
- **AARP** is an organization that operates the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). As the nation's oldest program to help low-income, unemployed individuals aged 50+ find work, AARP matches eligible older job seekers with local nonprofits and public agencies so they can increase skills and build self-confidence, while earning a modest income. Based on their employment interests and goals, participants may also receive supportive services and skills training through an educational institution.
- **VET Employment/Education Committee** of the Veteran Engagement Team of Southwest Michigan, highlighted above, also provides resources throughout the region.

Sector Strategies

Current Sector Based Partnerships and Business Involvement

In Region 8, a sector strategies approach is utilized to guide collaborations and priorities, and the focus areas of manufacturing, healthcare, accommodation/food service, construction, and agriculture, as identified above are in alignment with the State of Michigan, key industry sectors of agriculture, construction, energy, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, mobility, and hospitality and outdoor recreation.

Currently, robust consortium groups in Manufacturing, Electric Vehicle/Information Technology, and Healthcare exist in Region 8. Throughout the region, these existing consortium groups are active in the following ways:

- Engagement in employer group and individual employer Going PRO Talent Fund applications;
- Participation in joint career fairs and other events to assist job seekers and employers;
- Collective identification of needs and challenges of their specific industry;
- Developing and enhancing connections between job seekers with employers;
- Sharing of training needs; and
- General information and resource sharing.

Members of the consortium groups are reflective of Region 8, and include partners in:

- Education and training,
- Economic development,
- Community resources,
- Workforce development,
- State Representatives and
- Employers.

A critical step in the success of these consortiums includes maintaining strong employer engagement, as businesses of these groups continue to serve as change agents throughout the region and, as such, has been the foundation on which the groups were built. Convening regularly, for the purpose of gathering and disseminating information among sector partners and community stakeholders, has proven successful in the development of training activities, including the development of industry-recognized credentials, and holding solutions for training skills gaps that are identified by employers. The diverse and strategic membership of each consortium provides expertise and understanding of the specific industries, guiding each consortia's collective efforts.

Region 8 Manufacturing Consortiums and Organizations

The Manufacturing Growth Alliance, Battle Creek Advanced Manufacturing Consortium and the Kalamazoo Advanced Manufacturing Consortium use locally developed, innovative and integrated model to attract, screen, and train qualified candidates for current and future advanced manufacturing career opportunities.

Collectively, listed below are some of the innovative approaches in conjunction with training institutions that have been implemented to address the needs:

- Glen Oaks Community College (GOCC) Business and Industry Training;
- Kellogg Community College (KCC) Regional Manufacturing Technology Center (RMTC);
- Kellogg Community College iACT programs;
- Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) CNC Operator Academy;
- KVCC Mechatronic Technician Academy;
- Lake Michigan College, various apprenticeship programs;
- Southwestern Michigan College, various apprenticeship programs;
- Michigan Manufacturing Technical Corporation (MMTC) Supervisor Training Programs and Manufacturing Training Programs; and
- Society of Manufacturing Engineers (Tooling U) Certified Manufacturing Associates (CMfgA) Program.

Kalamazoo and Battle Creek Advanced Manufacturing Consortiums

Local manufacturers and service providers have been meeting since 2011 in Kalamazoo and since 2011 in Battle Creek. The groups, with an average of 35 manufacturing companies and community organizations, convene quarterly to discuss and develop innovative and integrated strategies to address this crucial issue, including on-the-job training, apprenticeships, career advancement, and payment of education.

The consortium meets to engage in dynamic conversations to identify issues that they collectively face as employers, share best practices, pool resources, create unified messaging to promote manufacturing and the skilled trades, and develop a stronger combined voice, representative of the manufacturing sector as a whole.

Manufacturing Growth Alliance

Manufacturing Growth Alliance (MGA), established in 2019, is a membership-based organization that helps over 2,500 Michigan manufacturers build smart, lead strong, and establish a pathway for future growth. MGA actively connects with manufacturers in Region 8 to understand trends, workforce challenges and needs of manufacturers. One focus area of MGA is supporting small manufacturers with technological advancements to remain globally competitive. Advancement in industry 4.0 technologies is essential to the survival of small manufacturing facilities in Region 8.

Southwest Michigan Healthcare Consortium

The Southwest Michigan Healthcare Consortium, an employer-led collaborative which began meeting in 2012, is a partnership and collaboration between healthcare providers, workforce development, education, and economic development throughout the counties of Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Calhoun, and Branch. The Consortium is inclusive of representatives from a variety of healthcare providers, including hospitals and acute care facilities, long-term care facilities, short-term care facilities, assisted living, and in-home care providers.

The focus of the Southwest Michigan Healthcare Consortium is to develop healthcare industry-based partnerships that promote the economic health and welfare of the areas' businesses and workers. While developing strategies to support the local healthcare ecosystem, the consortium also works to identify and help resolve issues that are important to the strength of area healthcare businesses and support the long-term health and growth of existing and future companies. This four-county group promotes regional activities to address healthcare worker shortages, skill shortages, training mismatches, and employee recruitment, retention, and organizational design issues that are common across this geographic area.

Today, the Consortium is made up of staff with a high degree of decision-making power or influence within their healthcare-based company, and the employer partners are critical to the success of the Consortium and the targeted outcomes. The employers set the agenda for quarterly meetings, during which employers participate in industry specific conversations and share their ideas, challenges, and solutions to assist each other in addressing the current challenges facing

the healthcare industry while creating an extensive network for the identified employers and partners. Members of the Southwest Michigan Healthcare Consortium support one another and the local economy through:

- Sharing best practices in a forum that includes healthcare employers and partners representing workforce development, education, and economic development;
- Planning and holding career fairs to assist with meeting current employer needs;
- Developing and maintaining a database of current healthcare providers within the Michigan Works! Southwest area; and
- Conducting periodic needs surveys and sharing the results.

The group continues to grow throughout the region while streamlining their work and enhancing the industry throughout Region 8.

Advanced IT Solutions Consortium

In 2023, The development of this consortium was spearheaded by employers representing the IT industry sector, committed to resolving talent gaps by applying supply-chain management principles to industry processes, to attract, develop and retain qualified talent for the IT industry, now and in the foreseeable future. Ensuring proper representation of Southwest Michigan information technology employers, of varying size and scope, and community partners of Region 8, has been a priority from its inception. Actively engaging employers and community partners during the development, to guide the agenda of Consortium meetings, has supported the progress towards workforce training goals.

The core focus of the Advanced IT Solutions Consortium is to support the local information technology ecosystem, including an enhanced focus on the rapidly evolving support for the production of electric vehicles. Industry employers, in partnership with local education and training providers, align existing, and develop new, training curriculums for the recruitment and/or upskilling information technology occupations, including the current and future electric vehicle industry workforce, supporting Michigan's 60% by 2030 goal.

The exploration of existing and enhancement of future career pathways, outlining advancement of high wage, in demand electrical occupations, within consortium companies, is also a part of the exploration of this consortium. With a focus on increasing and maintaining employer engagement, CBSP strategies are used when building relationships with employers, which includes operating a demand driven approach. Utilizing data to make informed decisions is critical to the continuance of this consortia, creating more local efforts to meet the region's needs.

Career Pathways

Career pathways are a strategic approach to workforce development that benefits individuals, employers, and the broader economy. They provide a roadmap for career advancement, ensure the

development of relevant skills, and foster collaboration between employers and training providers, ultimately leading to a more robust and dynamic workforce.

CEAC

The Career and Educational Advisory Council (CEAC) serves as the regional equivalent of educational advisory groups, required by Public Act 491 of 2006 to serve in an advisory capacity to the local WDB on educational issues. With a mission to create and support a talent preparation and development system that will provide all students, youth to the adult learner, with the necessary academic, technical, and work behavior skills that will meet business and industry needs to maintain and enhance the economy of the region, to achieve its primary purpose, the CEAC is specifically responsible to coordinate with other educational entities, in guiding career development programs and career pathways (such as high schools, community colleges, career and technical education, adult education, workforce development programs, Michigan Works! agencies, Offender Success programs, corrections education, veterans' programs, and college access networks) in support of the WDB's mission and strategic workforce development plans. With the guidance and assistance of the Career Educational Advisory Council (CEAC), Michigan Works! agencies in Region 8 will continue to keep career pathways at the forefront with educators for all age groups.

Regional Career Fairs

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest strive to work with employers throughout Region 8 on the planning, implementation and facilitation of virtual and in person career fairs across the region, as appropriate, as has been done in the past.

A nontraditional career fair model, which includes pre-event preparation sessions for job seekers, has been utilized in the past in order to assist in preparing the best possible job seekers for the employers. These preparation events include, but not limited to:

- Resume review by Michigan Works! staff or employer representatives for job seeker planning to attend the career fair;
- Mock interviews facilitated by Michigan Works! staff or employers prior to the event;
- Employability skill building workshop opportunities; and
- Employer panel information sharing/question and answer opportunities.

Employer Surveys

An additional regional strategy to focus on gathering information from employers and sharing the gathered information with employers will be a focus throughout the implementation of this plan. Recently, a collaborative survey was conducted by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Michigan Works! Southwest, Southwest Michigan First, and Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren to capture valuable information from local employers to better address regional challenges and opportunities. Together, the partners present the data to legislators that represent Southwest Michigan.

This survey examined issues related to employee attraction and retention such as wages, benefits, recruitment incentives like hiring bonuses, the changing structure of work, and workplace practices. It also examined alternative ways companies are trying to meet labor demand. The data focused on manufacturing and health-care establishments in Michigan's Prosperity Region 8: Van Buren, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Branch Counties. The results and additional information [can be found here](#).

4. Administrative Cost Requirements

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest leadership teams analyze performance and administrative requirements of regional funds to ensure that all distributions comply with state policy on an annual basis and upon receiving regionally allocated funds from the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. Upon completion of this analysis, administrative cost arrangements for the region are determined by the leadership teams of both organizations for the specific year or funding stream. As appropriate, a MOU or agreement will be completed, agreed upon and signed by the directors of both Michigan Works! agencies in Region 8, clearly stating the cost sharing requirements for that year for the associated funding stream.

5. Transportation and Supportive Service Coordination

As with all continuous improvement processes, there is an opportunity to improve and enhance transportation and supportive services throughout Region 8. Michigan Works! Southwest and BCVB Michigan Works! are committed to working on the potential of breaking down county line restrictions and barriers of service area alignment by county. These efforts will continue to be prioritized throughout the life of this plan to meet the needs of employers and job seekers.

Transportation

With the guidance and assistance of Michigan Works! Southwest and BCVB Michigan Works!, public transportation throughout the area has begun to work on ways to break down the geographic barriers of county lines. Trial projects for transporting job seekers and incumbent workers across county lines through meeting points at county lines to job search and maintain employment, have been completed and continue to be used.

Michigan Works! Southwest and BCVB Michigan Works! will continue to work with existing community and private transportation partners to explore additional options of cross regional transportation. The current list of partners and strategies includes:

- Transportation Partners:
 - Battle Creek Area Transit
 - Berrien County Public Transportation
 - Branch Area Transit Authority, Inc.
 - Cass County Transit
 - Kalamazoo Metro Transit
 - Marshall Albion Transit Authority
 - Private for-profit and non-profit transportation providers

- Saint Joseph County Transit Authority
- Van Buren Public Transit
- Strategic Partners:
 - Michigan Great Southwest
 - Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
 - Strategic Leadership Council
- Strategy:
 - Kalamazoo Metro Link (flexible on-demand Rideshare for Greater Kalamazoo)
 - Exploration of Other Ride Share Apps

Supportive Services

Federal and state policy guidelines often restrict the use of supportive services; thus, in order to improve and promote the coordination of supportive service delivery in Region 8, it is imperative that administrative and subrecipient/service provider staff continuously analyze supportive services to enhance and improve the coordination across the geographic area in order to best serve individuals seeking employment and/or employment retention. Staff have strong relationships with many of the service providers and will strive to enhance not only the existing relationships, but will work to build new ones, through active communication and participation in county-wide networks to assist in guiding, as well as leading, future coordination of transportation and supportive service delivery across the region.

Potential partners could include, but are not limited to:

- 211
- Advocacy Groups
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- Area Agency on Aging and Commission on Aging
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Burma Center
- Business Resource Networks
- Branch County Community Network
- Centro De Ayuda
- Centro Vida
- Childcare Resources
- Community Action Agency
- Community Foundations
- The Coordinating Council of Calhoun County
- County Land Banks
- Disability Network of Southwestern Michigan
- Employer Resource Networks ®
- Food Pantries
- Free Stores
- Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland
- Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan
- Habitat for Humanity
- Healthcare and Dental Agencies that provide services for the uninsured

- Housing Resources, Inc. and other agencies that assist with housing needs
- Human Resource organizations
- Job Accommodation Network
- Kalamazoo Probation and Parole Enhancement (KPEP)
- Kalamazoo RESA Career Development
- Keystone Place
- Legal Aid
- Literacy organizations
- Meals on Wheels
- Mental health & counseling agencies
- Michigan United
- Neighborhood programs
- Peer Support Groups
- Region 8 Literacy Hub
- Salvation Army
- Senior Services
- Southwest Michigan Community Development Corporation
- St. Joseph County Human Services Commission
- Telamon
- United Way organizations within the area
- Veterans Services and other organizations that serve veterans
- Voices of Battle Creek
- Youth Solutions

Staff from both BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest are active within their respective counties, as well as across the region, with support service providers and transportation entities to assist in guiding, as well as leading, future coordination of transportation and supportive service delivery across the region.

6. Collaboration

Due to the demand-driven model, as discussed, requiring the workforce development system to place business as the primary customer, BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest strive to be one-stop shops within their given counties, as well as in the region, to assist prospective employers, and existing customers with business development services through an integrated business retention and attraction program. In order to be successful, it is critical that a coordinated partnership with economic development services and providers within the region remains a priority.

Partnerships

Both Michigan Works! agencies in Region 8 have established relationships with local area community colleges, economic development organizations, planning commissions as well as the MEDC and LEO, and strive to enhance service delivery.

In order to ensure regional collaboration and success of employers and industries in Region 8, partner meetings to discuss best practices, current projects and review available resources are held regularly in the form of project specific meetings or through the work of the industry specific consortiums active in Region 8.

Economic Development

Current economic development organizations engaged in regional planning, include:

- Southwest Michigan First
 - Southwest Michigan First covers Region 8 in its entirety. The organization and their team are passionate about creating jobs and cultivating a strong economy in Southwest Michigan. Per their website, Southwest Michigan First was created for one singular purpose: To assist companies in growing jobs.
 - Southwest Michigan First focuses their activities on services and collaborations that promote business growth, including but not limited to, business-to-business marketing, supply chain recruitment, workforce development, capital acquisition, site selection, consulting services, brand development, and efficient government.
 - Michigan Works! Agencies throughout Region 8 are actively involved in the regional planning meetings, spearheaded by Southwest Michigan First, and plan to continue to do so as the region prioritizes economic development in all counties.

In addition to collaborating with Southwest Michigan First, partnerships have also been developed with the following economic development organizations:

- Albion Economic Development Corporation
- Battle Creek Unlimited
- Branch County Economic Growth Alliance
- Cornerstone Alliance

- Marshall Area Economic Development Alliance
- Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance
- Market Van Buren

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is also a critical partner in Region 8 in offering business assistance services and capital programs for business attraction and acceleration.

Training and Education

In support of, and in alignment with, sixty by 30 and Reconnect efforts, education and training providers currently involved with economic development that assist with regional planning include, but are not limited to:

- Berrien Regional Educational Services Agency
- Branch County Intermediate School District
- Calhoun County Intermediate School District
- Cornerstone University
- Davenport University
- Glen Oaks Community College
- Heritage Southwest Intermediate School District
- Kalamazoo Regional Educational Services Agency
- Kalamazoo Valley Community College
- Kellogg Community College
- Lake Michigan College
- Michigan Career Technical Institute
- Michigan Reconnect Program
- Saint Joseph County Intermediate School District
- Sixty by 30 Initiative
- Southwestern Michigan College
- The Center/MMTC
- Van Buren Intermediate School District
- Western Michigan University
- Other:
 - CTE Programs throughout the region
 - Early Middle College programs throughout the region

In addition, Michigan Training Connect, housed within the Pure Michigan Talent Connect system, will continue to be used throughout Region 8 to provide job seekers with the tools they need to select a training program to become employed in a high demand job industry.

Information gained from employers, in partnership with the identified economic developers, industry consortiums, and training institutions will remain a critical tool in creating and implementing needed training based on the demands of the industries in Region 8.

Employers

There are hundreds of businesses currently involved with BCVB Michigan Works!, Michigan Works! Southwest, the identified economic development organizations and the identified training organizations, including numerous businesses from emerging sectors/industries.

The use of apprenticeship programs in collaboration with employers and training providers has been a primary focus across the region. Apprenticeship programs combine classroom experience with hands-on training, providing the opportunity for individuals to earn a paycheck and receive debt free education while learning the skills they need to be successful in a career. An Apprenticeship includes both classroom studies with extensive on-the-job training under the supervision of a professional. The region's Business Solutions staff and the Apprenticeship Success Coordinators will continue to collaborate, as appropriate and connect businesses to a pathway of 'growing their own' talent through a USDOL Registered Apprenticeship. Region 8 staff will also focus on nontraditional apprenticeship opportunities to meet employer needs, as appropriate.

Going PRO Talent Fund

The State sees collaboration between Michigan Works! Agencies, economic development and education as essential in achieving demand-driven training that addresses talent shortages. BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest shares this vision. These organizations maximize Going PRO Talent Fund (GPTF) benefits for Region 8 by working together to meet the needs of the region's employers. The GPTF focuses on assisting companies in meeting talent challenges through the provision of competitive awards for employer responsive training that enhances talent, productivity, and employment retention while increasing the quality and competitiveness of Michigan's businesses.

As both Michigan Works! agencies in Region 8 spearhead the GPTF every year, collaboration amongst the two organizations, training institutions across the region, and regional economic development partners is critical to the success of this opportunity for employers in Southwest Michigan.

Per the [GPTF Dashboard](#), employers in Region 8 were awarded:

- 85 awards for fiscal year 2023 totaling \$4,763,010
- 75 awards for fiscal year 2024 totaling \$5,270,096
- 133 awards for fiscal year 2025 totaling \$8,142,226

In addition to supporting individual employer GPTF applications, BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest have strong Employer Led Collaboratives where groups of businesses, led by a champion employer, come together to solve a common or share workforce training problems.

In support of the progress and expansion of businesses in Southwest Michigan, BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest will continue to work collaboratively to assist employers in achieving this opportunity.

7. Regional Performance Goals

Both WIOA and Wagner-Peyser performance data is tracked in the One Stop Management Information System (OSMIS). The State Plan also describes that reports detailing performance on all performance measures are published quarterly for all local areas. These reports allow the state and local areas to monitor performance outcomes to establish trends and identify measures requiring corrective action, as well as track WIOA performance measures which serve as indicators to track progress toward meeting the state's goal and vision for the workforce investment system.

Both BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest monitor local performance for the individual area, as outlined in the individual local plans.

BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest strives to meet all local area negotiated performance measures and are currently navigating performance outcomes in response to the pandemic. In August of 2024, BCVB Michigan Works! and Michigan Works! Southwest anticipate the opportunity to negotiate performance measures for PY2024, with the State of Michigan. If necessary, leadership staff across the two Michigan Works! agencies will analyze performance requirements and collectively negotiate to reach agreement on local levels of performance for the performance accountability measures outlined in the WIOA Section 116, including meeting the measures identified in the 2024 State of Michigan Combined State Plan.