



# 2026

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

**DISCOVER**  
MANUFACTURING™

# ABOUT THE COUNCIL



## MISSION AND VISION

Discover Manufacturing is a regional network of hundreds of manufacturers dedicated to addressing both the current and future talent needs of West Michigan's manufacturing industry. In collaboration with partners in education, workforce development and economic development, we are focused on training the current workforce, promoting the industry to future generations and sharing opportunities and best practices within the sector.



## INDUSTRY IMPACT

Michigan's manufacturing sector is a major contributor to the region's economy, employing roughly 142,000 people. The sector is projected to remain steady through 2030 and offers average salaries above the statewide average, typically around \$94,000 annually.

**Manufacturing isn't just an industry—it's part of who we are. With so many families depending on these jobs and the opportunity they provide, we can't take its future for granted. Discover Manufacturing brings people together—industry, educators and workforce leaders—to listen, plan and act. It's about making sure the next generation is ready, our businesses stay strong and West Michigan continues to be a place where manufacturing, and our communities, can thrive.**

*- Paul Sischo, Industry Council Lead - Discover Manufacturing*

# OUR STRATEGY

**TRAIN • PROMOTE • COMMUNICATE**



## DEVELOP TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

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Informing curriculum development and spearheading initiatives that provide ongoing training for incumbent workers and introductory training for new manufacturers.



## PROMOTE MANUFACTURING CAREERS

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Executing initiatives to promote advanced manufacturing careers to students and young adults showcasing career paths and growth.



## SHARE BEST PRACTICES ACROSS WEST MICHIGAN

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Creating initiatives aimed at informing our membership of the best practical strategies to attract and maintain a skilled workforce.



# MICAREERQUEST

This year's MiCareerQuest showed what we can accomplish when we work together. With over 100 total exhibitors and more than 8,300 students in attendance, the event was filled with energy, curiosity and meaningful connection. From hands-on experiences to conversations with professionals, students had the chance to see their futures in a new way—and businesses had the opportunity to inspire the next generation of talent. What stood out most was the dedication and passion of everyone involved; together, we created an environment where exploration and discovery could thrive.

**As a first-time exhibitor, I was blown away by the engagement from the students and scale of the event. I walked away feeling rewarded by the opportunity to leave a positive impression on the upcoming workforce in our industry.**

*- Danny Sharkey, SoundOff Signal*



**38**  
**EXHIBITORS**

**8,100+**  
**STUDENTS**

**90**  
**SCHOOLS**



# BE THE DIFFERENCE

## DM SCHOLARSHIPS

The Discover Manufacturing Scholarship program continues to expand, drawing 34 applicants this year, 28 of whom met the eligibility requirements, with 13 recipients collectively receiving \$11,000 in awards.

Thanks to the continued support of our partners and sponsors, we have awarded a total of \$75,500 in scholarships to students pursuing manufacturing careers since the program's inception in manufacturing and related fields. These scholarships represent an investment in the next generation of talent that will drive our industry forward.



**Receiving this support will make it easier for me to stay focused on my coursework, earn more industry certifications, and continue building the skills I need for a future career in engineering design and manufacturing.**

*- Tyler Klopfenstein, Kellogg Community College*



**8  
FIRST TIME  
SCHOLARSHIPS**

**5  
RENEWAL  
SCHOLARSHIPS**

**\$11,000  
AWARDED**

# BE THE CHANGE

## DISCOVER MANUFACTURING TOURS

Discover Manufacturing Tours 2025 was one of our most impactful yet. This year, 95 West Michigan businesses opened their doors, offering more than 200 tours that showcased real career opportunities in modern manufacturing.

Thanks to the collaboration of educators, businesses and community partners, students were able to see firsthand what today's manufacturing careers look like and how they contribute to our regional economy. Discover Manufacturing Tours continues to grow, and we're proud to see the impact it's making across West Michigan.

**I wanted to share how wonderful the experience was. One student said that he learned more today than he has all school year! West Michigan Works!, I truly appreciate all the effort and coordination that went into making today possible.**

*- Kelly Kirkland, Jenison Public Schools*

**95**  
BUSINESSES

**3,310**  
STUDENTS

**67**  
SCHOOLS



**\$5,314,00**  
TRAINING  
DOLLARS INVESTED



**2,341**  
PROFESSIONALS  
TRAINED



**278**  
ENGAGED  
BUSINESSES



**474**  
PROJECT  
VOLUNTEERS

# CAREER READINESS CONFERENCE

This event brought together educators, employers and workforce and industry leaders who share a commitment to strengthening West Michigan's talent pipeline. The collaboration, energy and insights in the room reflected a dedication to preparing the next generation.

Together, we examined workforce data, exchanged practical strategies for work-based learning and partnerships and strengthened connections between education and industry. These efforts—and the momentum they create—help ensure students are ready for future opportunities.



**The Career Readiness Conference continues to be a valuable opportunity for employers and educators to come together around a shared goal: preparing students for meaningful careers. I left with new ideas, stronger connections and renewed appreciation.**

*- Mandy Dalziel, Mission Design & Automation*



**210**  
ATTENDEES

**11**  
PLANNING  
ORGANIZATIONS

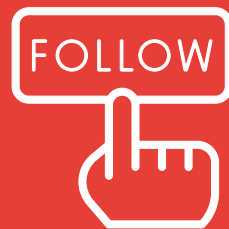
**16**  
BREAKOUT  
SESSIONS



**11,811**  
STUDENTS  
EXPLORED  
CAREERS



**16**  
EVENTS  
ATTENDEES



**1,486**  
LINKEDIN AND  
NEWSLETTER  
FOLLOWERS





# COUNCIL MEMBERS

- SARAH GARNER  
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON  
NN INC.
- KACEY REGAN  
COUNCIL VICE CHAIRPERSON  
DEWYS METAL SOLUTIONS
- JAY DUNWELL  
WOLVERINE COIL SPRING CO.
- KRISTEN TJALSMA  
MILLERKNOLL
- STEVE HEETHUIS  
PRAECO SKILLS
- STEPHANIE BRIGGS  
MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- SHANNON PETTIT  
MERSEN
- JENNIFER LUZAR  
AMERICAN SEATING  
COMPANY
- JAKE VANDERKOLK  
GENTEX
- VICTOR JOAQUIN  
THE RIGHT PLACE
- RYAN GRAHAM  
KENT ISD
- AMY LEBEDNICK  
WEST MICHIGAN WORKS!

# FUNDERS

- MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT  
OF LABOR AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
- WEST MICHIGAN WORKS!
- THE RIGHT PLACE  
MANUFACTURERS COUNCIL
- BRADFORD WHITE CORPORATION
- WOLVERINE COIL SPRING CO
- METAL FLOW CORPORATION
- MERSEN
- DEWYS METAL SOLUTIONS
- DICASTAL NORTH AMERICA
- GRA250
- GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- MONTCALM COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- KENT ISD
- MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION
- THE MANUFACTURING MILLENNIAL
- HAWORTH
- THOMPSON MTEC
- WOODWARD, INC.

**DISCOVER**  
MANUFACTURING™



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