Today’s six presentations will summarize projects identified by the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA) as “Tier One” projects. A total of 31 projects were submitted for review. The remaining projects are identified in the Regional Prosperity Plan and will be on the WMPA’s website.

Today’s presenters were asked to keep their presentations to under ten minutes and provide the following information:

1. Description of Project
2. Resources used and resources yet needed
3. Other partners involved and collaborations yet to happen
4. Action Plan with Timelines
5. Tangible benefit to region with measurable outcomes
6. Estimated Cost – provide a preliminary budget

The order of presentations, shown below, was randomly selected:

1. Protecting Lake Michigan Water Quality through Establishment of a Dedicated Revenue Stream for Watershed Management
2. Emerge Regional Website Portal/ E-Merge West Michigan
3. Michigan Works Strategic Redesign
5. Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub
6. Michigan Work Ready Communities

A summary of each of the six projects follows. Project Two (Emerge/E-Merge) was originally submitted by two separate organizations, but this will be a collaborative effort as it moves forward.
1. **Project Title:** Protecting Lake Michigan Water Quality through Establishment of a Dedicated Revenue Stream for Watershed Management  
**Project Contact:** Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, Steve Bulthuis, 616-395-2688, sbulthuis@the-macc.org  
**Project Location:** West Michigan Prosperity Region  
**Project Summary:** This proposal develops a program that would generate sustainable financial resources to protect the water quality of Lake Michigan. Funding would be distributed to local watershed organizations working under federally approved watershed management plans. All thirteen counties Region 4 contain watersheds that drain into Lake Michigan and most have watershed management plans. The Governor has emphasized the importance of water as a competitive advantage for the state and important to economic development. Depending on the type of project being undertaken by a particular organization, employment opportunities are numerous. Water resources are a strategic advantage for the state and are likely to become more so in the future. Impact could be furthered by collaborating with other RPI regions. Watershed management plans must include a strategy for sustaining the watershed. This project would have long-term impacts. Many watershed-based organizations already have public-private partnerships. The Office of Great Lakes is poised to release Michigan’s Water Strategy that will address such topics as: invasive species, water withdrawal, water use and conflict, water quality and infrastructure, legacy pollution and restoration, algal blooms and muck, and coastal resilience. This proposal would strengthen watershed-based organizations that have control over water quality improvements for their particular situation.

2. **Project Title:** Emerge Regional Website Portal & E-Merge West Michigan  
**Project Contact:** Emerge, Laurie Supinski, 231-250-2845, laurie@emergewm.com & Talent 2025, Kevin Stotts, 616-871-2425, kstotts@TALENT2025.org  
**Project Location:** Region 4  
**Project Summary:** Emerge is a group of public and private organizations, working to provide services to entrepreneurs. The name Emerge originated when a group of lakeshore Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs) formed a collaborative alliance. Within a similar timeframe a growing ESO group in Grand Rapids developed a web portal to serve as a one stop shop for entrepreneurs. Recognizing the similar missions, the groups established a West Michigan Regional effort with over 40 regional partners across seven counties. Keeping the Emerge name, the group researched a number of best practices and expanded the primary goal of a web portal to aggregate resources, identify responsibilities, and ensure access to resources.

The Emerge portal allows entrepreneurs to identify partner organizations that provide the assistance they need. Once they’ve engaged with a partner for help, the Emerge portal will track their progression to ensure they receive the necessary support for their start-up activity. The portal will evolve to track the progress of the entrepreneurs and will serve as a tool to identify the strengths of the services provided by the region as well as any gaps. The initiative’s strategy highlights West Michigan’s organized approach to economic growth. (continued on page 3)
Project Summary: Talent 2025 is leading the development of a business plan to create a regional framework to foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem within Region 4. The key partners in this process will include Talent 2025 companies, the interim E-Merge West Michigan Executive Committee, Region 4 business incubators, economic development organizations, local units of government, entrepreneurial services organizations, institutions and entrepreneurial service providers currently supporting entrepreneurship and innovation within the region. The plan will provide an implementation plan for developing a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. The plan will build upon the existing organizations supporting and delivering outcomes, identify gaps, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem to ensure investment and job creation is above and beyond what is currently being delivered and in more business sectors and skill levels. The challenges the region faces as it relates to talent retention, attraction, and retraining will be addressed through this plan. Having an entrepreneurial ecosystem will help us retain the talented workforce that is trained in our educational institutions, attract the talent needed to serve the region, and allow for the existing workforce to engage in entrepreneurship in ways they not have before. The organization will build upon the strengths of the region.

3. Project Title: Michigan Works Strategic Redesign
Project Contact: Muskegon Michigan Works, Deborah Groeneveld, 231-724-6450, groeneveldde@miworksmo.org
Project Location: West Michigan

Project Summary: West Michigan has a history of entrepreneurship and innovation, and its job creators have led the charge out of the Great Recession. However, we are approaching a talent crisis, which will halt the progress we have made if we do not find a solution quickly. The disconnect is that people looking for work do not have the skills to fill employers’ needs. Employers are critical of the community's ability to produce employees with the necessary skills so that they can remain globally competitive. Michigan Works! Region 4 desires to provide local employers with more work/skill ready employees. With the engagement of a design thinking firm, that focuses on Human Centered Design, as a partner with Michigan Works! Region 4 it will help us understand the talent needs and why many job seekers fall short of employer expectations. This project will give Michigan Works! Region 4 the advantage of closing the skills gap between employers and job seekers. This solution may also become a best practice for the State of Michigan and possibly the entire Country.
4. Project Title: Connected Community Engagement Program, Technology Action Planning  
Project Contact: Connect Michigan, Eric Frederick, 517-994-8024, efrederick@connectmi.org  
Project Location: Allegan, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Montcalm Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and Ottawa counties (other counties have plans in-place)  
Project Summary: Connect Michigan is helping communities identify their technology needs and opportunities. Through this program, communities work to expand the availability, adoption, and use of technology toward creating a more productive and technology-savvy population, a better business environment, more effective community and economic development, improved healthcare, enhanced education, and more efficient government. The Connected program is comprised of four primary steps; 1) Identify community champions and gather local stakeholders, 2) Assess the local broadband/technology landscape, 3) Identify gaps and develop a technology action plan, and 4) Implement projects to increase access, adoption, and use of broadband and technology and achieve Connected Certification. Connect Michigan Community Technology Advisors typically meet with each community/county once per month for eight to fourteen months, depending on the time required to complete the assessment and planning process. While this grassroots-style of engagement is more resource intensive, it is showing results and provides the best environment for collaboration, accountability, and implementation. Our proposal for the Region 4 Prosperity Initiative is to implement the Connected Community Engagement program in the ten remaining counties in the region to address local broadband and technology issues, help accelerate broadband expansion, and establish a broadband planning process throughout the region.

5. Project Title: Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub  
Project Contact: West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, Erin Kuhn, 231-722-7878, ekuhn@wmsrdc.org  
Project Location: Muskegon County, Michigan  
Project Summary: The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission in Partnership with Muskegon County, the City of Muskegon, Muskegon Area First, and Grand Valley State University Michigan Alternative & Renewable Energy Center is submitting the Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub project. A group of regional public and private community leaders are working together to further the development of the Muskegon Port as a regional logistic hub and an economic asset to the region. The Muskegon Port is serviced by a variety of multi-model assets including truck routes, rail access points, and airports. The Port of Muskegon is utilized for both recreational and commercial uses. Leaders in Muskegon County are looking at the feasibility of establishing a local food hub and the U.S. Coast Guard has been petitioned to allow river barges with a conditional exemption from load line requirements onto the Calumet, IL-Muskegon route along Lake Michigan, which will significantly increase the use of the port as a regional logistic hub. The Alternative Energy sector is interested in partnering in the development of the port. The successful development of a regional logistic hub will require collaboration amongst several regional partnerships some of which have already been established through various groups.
6. Project Title: Michigan Work Ready Communities
Project Contact: Talent 2025, Kevin Stotts, 616-871-2425, kstotts@TALENT2025.org
Project Location: Region 4

Project Summary: The Michigan Work Ready Communities (MiWRC) initiative will assist employers to find work-ready individuals. Employers are struggling to find individuals whose training, skills, and experience match specific job requirements. Many job candidates are also unable to demonstrate a match between their skills and experience for jobs to which they apply. By being able to quantify and report the employability skill sets of the West Michigan workforce, employers outside the region will be more likely to relocate to West Michigan.

MiWRC focuses on enhancing fundamental credentials of young people who are ready to enter the workforce, as well as adults who have two years or less in a post-secondary education. This initiative will match the needs of employers in industry sectors, represented in the region, to the skills and expertise of potential employees. By having a standardized certification requirement for the region, employers will have tools to better ensure suitability and retention of talent.

This initiative brings together workforce and economic development and links K-12 and higher education to employers. This initiative will help identify skill gaps and as a result, help to plan for training and develop actions that are necessary in the region.

The WMPA solicited projects from across the region and from across interests. The WMPA evaluated each project based on the following criteria adopted on April 30, 2014.

1. Long-term impact & sustainability of project
2. Regional Impact – proportion of the Region potentially impacted by the project
3. Provide employment opportunities to people with a variety of skill levels in a variety of employment sectors
4. Recognizes Region’s strengths and challenges
5. Project promotes and supports public and private partnerships