

PROPOSAL ABSTRACT

Applicant Name: West Michigan Strategic Alliance

Project Title: “West Michigan Workforce Innovations Lab”

Key Strategies: Under the leadership of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, a regional leadership organization covering seven counties in West Michigan (Kent, Allegan, Ottawa, Muskegon, Newaygo, Barry, and Ionia), we will develop and manage an “innovations lab” designed to advance and spawn a wide range of innovations in our regional workforce development system. These include four categories of innovations:

1. Market Intelligence initiatives designed to better understand the detailed structure of regional employment clusters and the emerging requirements for the innovation economy. These include: an analysis of the skill development needs of our emerging life sciences, alternative energy and sustainable manufacturing sectors; analysis of the evolution of the global supply chains in the region’s industries and how it affects skill development demand; development of a strategy for attracting and retaining knowledge workers through new workplace designs; and a system for regional outreach and engagement.
2. The Innovation Institute, which will bring together all of our region’s initiatives focused on: building awareness and knowledge about innovation; implementing innovation systems in regional companies; and developing innovation skills in our current and emerging workforce. Initiatives under the Innovation Institute include development of a comprehensive innovations skills curriculum; launch of an Industrial Design Council; development of an Innovation Forum; and development of a regional infrastructure for intellectual property commercialization.

3. Workforce System Transformation initiatives designed to restructure key elements of our workforce development and education system for emerging, existing and transitional workers, including: 1) performance-based credentialing using WorkKeys; 3) development of a model Global School; 4) accelerated engineering program; 5) implementation of the Manufacturing Skills Standards system; 6) development of an employer-owned manufacturing skill development cooperative; and 7) a regional model for entry-level employment retention and advancement for disadvantaged populations; and 8) a regional model for skill development for the health care sector.
4. Enterprise Development initiatives designed to stimulate entrepreneurship and new business creation in key sectors of the innovation economy. Under this initiative, we will launch a regional model of the successful Entrepreneurial League System®.

Strategic Partnership Members: Our partnership members represent both sectoral (education; workforce development; economic development; private sector; philanthropy) and geographic diversity. They include: Grand Valley State University; Michigan State University; Best Michigan (a regional economic development partnership); The Right Place, Inc.; the Greater Grand Rapids Manufacturers Council, and several other Manufacturers Councils in the region; regional Workforce Investment Boards; Grand Rapids Community College; the Kent Intermediate School District; the West Michigan Science and Technology Initiative; the Van Andel Institute; The Delta Strategy; and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Requested Funding Level: We are requesting a total of \$15,000,000 in funding over a three-year period to support the West Michigan Workforce Innovations Lab.