



REGIONAL ECONOMIC ECOSYSTEM REPORT

SPRING 2025

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Traverse Connect hosted the Skyline & Shoreline: West Bay Aerial Mobility Showcase on May 6 at Discovery Pier in Traverse City. Attendees watched real-time demonstrations over West Grand Traverse Bay, including drone use cases such as environmental monitoring, lakebed mapping, and search-and-rescue missions. The event highlighted Michigan's leadership in advanced aerial mobility and featured participation from public safety agencies, researchers, and technology partners.

INTRODUCTION

TO OUR INVESTORS AND PARTNERS



Warren Call

Thank you for reading Traverse Connect's Spring 2025 semi-annual Economic Ecosystem Report. Published each spring and fall, the Economic Ecosystem Report is intended to supplement Traverse Connect's [Quarterly Growth Barometer Updates](#) and its [Annual Report](#). This report highlights our work to grow the Grand Traverse regional economy via our business attraction, industry cluster, and growth efforts, as well as our talent attraction and retention efforts.

This report provides an update on the continuation of the comprehensive economic development strategies as outlined in the Traverse Connect Strategic Plan, including leading regional economic development strategy, providing business expansion services, managing talent attraction, implementing business attraction programs, as well as supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, community development, and infrastructure development.

Our work would not be possible without the partnerships and support from the public sector, our investors, and our strategic partners. We thank you for your ongoing support in making the Grand Traverse region a great place to live. Over the past six months, we have achieved several crucial economic development milestones. Thanks to you, our partners, we can continue these efforts to create a vibrant and healthy economic ecosystem.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Warren M. Call". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Warren" being more prominent.

President & CEO
Traverse Connect

REGIONAL DASHBOARD

Traverse Connect tracks five metrics in Talent Attraction & Development and Economic Development to measure the region's progress against our organization's vision and goals for 2030. The vision: By 2030, the Grand Traverse region will be a diversified economic destination of choice powered by growth-oriented enterprises providing competitive total compensation to match our world-class quality of life. Data is an imperfect, yet necessary, tool to measure those gains. Four of the five key metrics on the Traverse Connect [Regional Dashboard](#) trended upward and positively going into 2025, while the metric related to Annual GDP Per Employee remains neutral.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ANNUAL GDP PER
EMPLOYEE
2030 GOAL: \$84,000

\$73,767



STATE AVERAGE WAGE
PERCENTAGE
2030 GOAL: 90%

87%



TALENT ATTRACTION & DEVELOPMENT

BACHELOR'S DEGREE
OR POST-SECONDARY
CERTIFICATE
2030 GOAL: 60%

53%



GROWTH OF PRIME
WORKING AGE
POPULATION (35-49)
2030 GOAL: 5%

8%



SCIENTIFIC,
PROFESSIONAL,
TECHNICAL, & IT JOBS
2030 GOAL: 3,200

2,825



SEMI-ANNUAL KEY MILESTONES

REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

- Traverse Connect's CEO & President, Warren Call, and Director of Government Relations, Haley Bennett, attended the Mackinac Policy Conference in May, where they engaged with business and policy leaders on key topics, including the state budget, new economic development legislation, and state housing initiatives. During the conference Traverse Connect developed a full itinerary of engagement opportunities with policy makers culminating in an evening networking event co-sponsored by The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance.
- Successfully advocated for creating the [\\$60M Michigan Innovation Fund and an R&D tax credit](#). The legislation has specific carve-out language designating investment fund allocations for 20Fathoms in Traverse City and Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance partner, InvestUP.
- Hosted a successful Northern Michigan Policy Conference in January with record attendance. State and Federal policy makers joined business leaders from across Michigan to learn more about the region's advocacy priorities, and Governor Whitmer used the event stage to announce a new [employer-assisted housing fund](#).
- Traverse Connect continues to work in collaboration with 20Fathoms to roll out Small Business Support Hubs programming for Northwest Lower Michigan regional businesses, including early development of an E-Guide to Customer Discovery.
- The formation of the new legal entity for the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center is official! The new board of directors hosted the first meeting on February 5, 2025, to elect the board, approve articles of incorporation and bylaws, and continue work to complete the facility, fundraising, and the [all-important task of ensuring the building is full of dedicated researchers and innovative companies](#).



BUSINESS ATTRACTION & INDUSTRY CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT



- Hosted the second annual [Northern Michigan Manufacturing Summit](#) in May where industry leaders discussed workforce issues, tariffs and trade, and innovation in the regional manufacturing sector.
- Hosted the [Skyline & Shoreline](#) showcase including aerial innovation demonstrations and testing over Grand Traverse Bay. This event is highlighted on page 14 of this report.
- In partnership with technology providers blueflite and DroneUp, and partners Munson Healthcare, and Central Michigan University's Rural Health Equity Institute, Traverse Connect secured a second round of funding of almost \$1M via the [Advanced Aerial Mobility grant](#) to scale a pilot program utilizing uncrewed aircraft systems to optimize the delivery of medical cargo between Munson's healthcare facilities. This second round of funding was announced during a specially hosted Media Day on May 19 to cover the medical cargo delivery pilot which took place between Munson facilities in May.



SEMI-ANNUAL KEY MILESTONES

- Traverse Connect's Director of Ecosystem Development Camille Hoisington, represented the region via a kiosk at the Michigan Pavilion at [XPONENTIAL 2025](#), in Houston TX, in May. Hosted by AUUVSI (Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International), XPONENTIAL is the leading conference for uncrewed systems and autonomous technology.
- Finalized a memo of understanding for the Northsky Consortium with 20Fathoms, NMC, Traverse Connect, and industry partners. The consortium's purpose is to strategically lead a concerted effort to transform Northern Michigan and the Traverse City region into a national hub for Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Advanced Aerial Mobility (AAM) to drive innovation, workforce development, and economic growth.



- Traverse Connect and the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council partnered with the National Defense Industry Association – Michigan Chapter to host the first Northern Michigan Defense Conference in March. The event brought together regional manufacturers with the U.S. Army Contracting Command, Michigan Army National Guard, and other U.S. military leaders to strengthen defense industry supply chains.

- Building on the momentum of Traverse Connect's annual E-Boat Demo Days and MichAuto's annual Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, plans are underway to launch the inaugural 'ReShore' event in August this year. ReShore will convene innovators, industry leaders, and policymakers to spotlight Northern Michigan's rising leadership in bluetech, outdoor recreation, advanced

aerial systems, and future mobility. Stay tuned!

TALENT INITIATIVES

- The Michigan Economic Development Corporation awarded Prosperity Region 2 (Northwest Michigan) a \$500,000 talent program grant for 2025 to support a remote worker study, and expansion of the Michigan's Creative Coast program, and rural talent attraction efforts. The grant was awarded to Networks Northwest and the Collaborative Development Council, including Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (Petoskey), Traverse Connect, the Manistee Chamber, and the Alliance for Economic Success (Cadillac).
- Expanded and improved the [Michigan's Creative Coast Resume Pack](#) initiative that provides resumes from job seekers delivered directly to the inbox of employers and HR managers.
- Leadership Grand Traverse and a new Traverse Connect leadership development program, Let Her Speak, concluded the most recent sessions this spring with ceremonies and presentations of the program participants.



- The Michigan Growth Office announced its latest round of [Make MI Home grants](#) to new programs that will retain and attract a talented workforce statewide. Northwest Michigan's consortium of Traverse Connect, Networks Northwest, Alliance for Economic Success, Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce, Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce, and Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce will provide housing assistance to retain and attract professionals working or relocating to work in the Northwest region.

SEMI-ANNUAL KEY MILESTONES

PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

- Completed a Unified Prosperity Plan in partnership with Grand Traverse County Economic Development Corporation and based upon a series of 2024 workshops with leaders from the sixteen municipalities within Grand Traverse County.
- Renewed economic development services contract with East Bay Township for a three-year term, including a Marketing Plan for the Township as part of the Redevelopment Ready Community certification process.
- Renewed an economic development services contract with the City of Traverse City for a three-year term.
- Traverse Connect continues professional services agreements for economic development work with East Bay Township, Garfield Township, Traverse City Downtown Development Authority, TVC-Cherry Capital Airport, and Grand Traverse County. These public/private partnerships are critical to Traverse Connect's long-term efforts in entrepreneurial ecosystem development and talent attraction for the region.



ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Growth Model

At Traverse Connect, our approach to economic development is forward-thinking and non-traditional. Instead of focusing all our resources on “chasing smokestacks,” we value a healthy mix of attracting new business to the region while supporting the growth of our existing companies and encouraging the creation of new industries from the ground up.

Building a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem means fostering a culture of openness and information exchange between companies and across industries within our region, from corporate headquarters and startup entrepreneurs, down to Main Street coffee shop founders. Our goal is to ignite a community of entrepreneurs and local partners who feed off each other’s talent, creativity, and support at each stage of growth. By focusing on local business conditions, we hope to create clusters of new firms and industries that ultimately produce a fertile landscape long term.

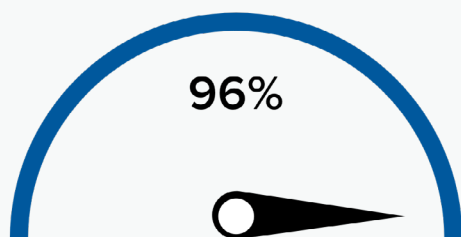
By encouraging the growth of our existing assets – healthy partner relationships, the scaling up of our existing companies – and attracting new business, we will see our already vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem continue to flourish and grow.

Business Growth Barometer Survey

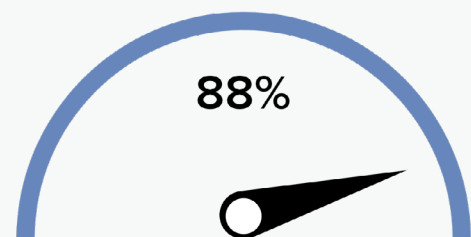
Traverse Connect conducts a quarterly Business Growth Barometer Survey of investor and member businesses, aimed at providing a snapshot of the regional business sentiment, outlook, and current challenges. Quarterly surveys inform Traverse Connect’s strategic priorities and help it respond to the needs of the business community.

The survey asks two simple questions:

1) Is our region a good place to grow your business?



2) Is our region improving as a place to grow your business?

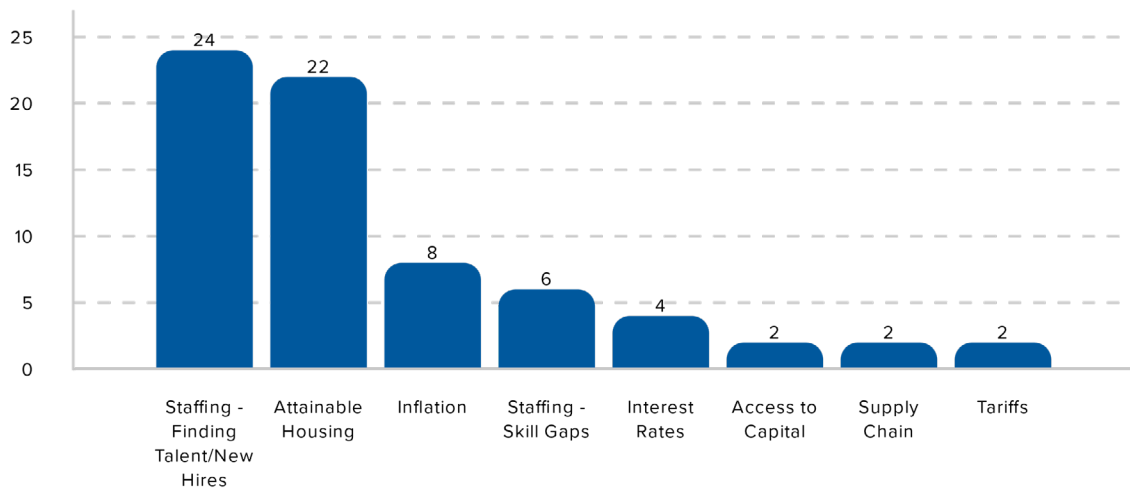


The results of the **most recent survey (Q1 2025)** show that 96% of respondents agree that the Grand Traverse region is a good place to grow their business, with 88% in agreement that the region is improving as a place to grow their business; both measurements showed a significant increase from the fourth quarter of 2024.

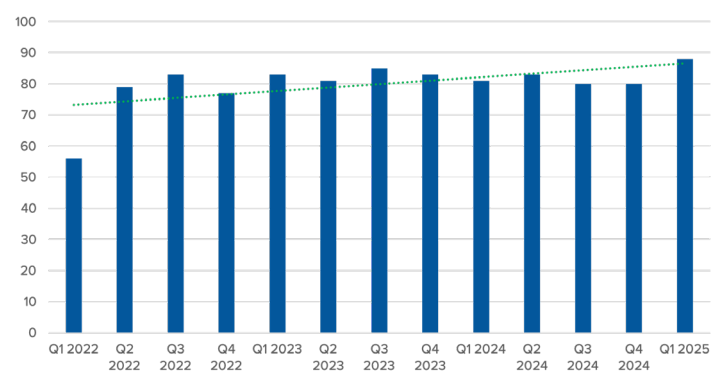
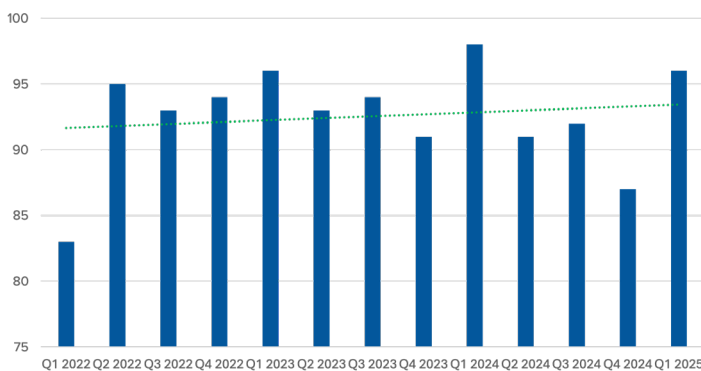
Business Growth Barometer Survey

WHAT IS THE SINGLE-BIGGEST BARRIER TO GROWING YOUR BUSINESS?

Changes to the 2025 survey offered respondents two different staffing-related responses to the question, “What is the single-biggest barrier to growing your business?”: finding and hiring talent, and skill gaps. Nearly a quarter of respondents cited finding and hiring talent as their primary barrier to growth. Traverse Connect and other economic development partners in Northwest Michigan will be working on talent attraction and retention strategies in the second quarter of 2025.



GROWTH BAROMETER REGIONAL BUSINESS OUTLOOK



1) Is our region a good place to grow your business?

2) Is our region improving as a place to grow your business?



REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

*Traverse Connect has identified **target businesses and industry clusters** with strong potential to prosper and thrive in Northern Michigan. Place-based and tech-based economic development strategies consider both the industries already rooted in the region and the area's unique natural resources and assets. Traverse Connect has worked to define and promote Northern Michigan's distinct value proposition and market opportunities—highlighting the region's existing businesses, infrastructure, and cultural assets that form a competitive entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

Target Market Engagement

FOSTERING THE ADVANCED AERIAL MOBILITY INDUSTRY

THE VISION: Building A National Hub for Commercial Drone Innovation and Workforce Development

Traverse Connect continues to advance the vision of establishing the Grand Traverse Region as a national hub for commercial drone innovation and workforce development. In close collaboration with regional partners, we are steadily building the infrastructure, partnerships, and programs needed to support this growing advanced aerial mobility (AAM) industry—from FAA-certified workforce training and BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight) corridors to real-world testing environments and a thriving startup ecosystem. With a strategic focus on developing this industry cluster, we remain committed to positioning Northern Michigan as a leader in uncrewed aerial systems, strengthening local industries, and attracting national attention and investment.



Medical Delivery Drone Projects Contribute to Region's Economy

Traverse City Record-Eagle, May 2025

ADVANCED AERIAL MOBILITY ACTIVATION FUND AWARD

Traverse Connect Receives Second Round of Grant Funding to Further Implement Advanced Aerial Mobility Pilot Programs

In July 2024, Traverse Connect received a grant from the Advanced Aerial Mobility (AAM) Activation Fund, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Office of Future Mobility and Electrification (OFME), and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), with support from Newlab, to streamline AAM growth in Michigan. As a 'regional implementation partner,' Traverse Connect has collaborated with partners in technology, higher education, nonprofits, and the private sector to pilot various drone technology use cases in northern Michigan. The projects receiving funding are outlined below:

RURAL HEALTHCARE DELIVERY & HOSPITAL SYSTEM OPTIMIZATION

Over a three-week period in May, Traverse Connect collaborated with Munson Healthcare, blueflite, DroneUp, and Central Michigan University's Rural Health Equity Institute to deliver laboratory samples and medical supplies between Munson Medical Center and two of its facilities—Munson Dialysis Center and Copper Ridge Surgery Center. These flights are part of an ongoing effort by Munson Healthcare, blueflite, and DroneUp to iterate and refine a drone-based delivery system that optimizes supply chain logistics, improves quality, and supports timely patient care.

This initiative aims to enhance healthcare access in rural communities by streamlining logistics through drone technology. In partnership with Munson Healthcare,

technology providers DroneUp and blueflite, and Central Michigan University's Rural Health Equity Institute, the project is testing the use of drones to transport lab samples, medical supplies, and other critical healthcare goods. The objective is to demonstrate a faster, more efficient delivery method that reduces reliance on road transport and strengthens supply chain resilience across northern Michigan's rural hospital network.

Medical drones to begin pilot flights in Traverse City

WCMU Public Radio, May 2025

Fostering the Advanced Aerial Mobility Industry

Phase 1 of the project, which began in May 2025, focuses on testing VLOS (Visual Line of Sight) drone deliveries between Munson Medical Center and the two participating facilities. Future phases will expand this work; Phase 2 will test BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight) capabilities.

In May 2025 it was announced that a second round of

funding in the amount of almost \$1M will be administered by Traverse Connect to implement a ramped-up Phase 3 of multi-mission BVLOS flights to transport medical cargo between multiple Munson Healthcare facilities. The long-term goal is to establish a sustained, scalable drone delivery logistics program for rural healthcare systems in Michigan and beyond.



Record-Eagle photo/Jan-Michael Stump



Record-Eagle photo/Jan-Michael Stump



Munson Healthcare photo/Megan Brown



Munson Healthcare photo/Megan Brown

Munson Healthcare tests drones for faster medical supply delivery – UpNorth Live, May 2025

Munson Healthcare working towards drone delivery of prescriptions, test samples – 9&10 News, May 2025

Local drone project lands another \$950,000 from state – Traverse City Record-Eagle, May 2025

Munson Healthcare trials drones for streamlined medical logistics - AirMed & Rescue, May 2025

Michigan Drone Delivery Project Lands Second State Grant of \$950,000 - DroneXL, May 2025

Target Market Engagement

SKYLINE & SHORELINE: THE INTERSECTION OF DRONES & WATER

On May 6, 2025, Traverse Connect and its partners hosted an event — Skyline & Shoreline: West Bay Aerial Mobility Showcase — a public demonstration of how advanced drone technologies can be applied to solve real-world challenges across public safety, environmental monitoring, and infrastructure planning. Held at Discovery Pier on the shores of Grand Traverse Bay, the event drew a crowd of industry leaders, community stakeholders, and the public to witness three live flight missions and hear from key leaders shaping Michigan's growing aerial mobility ecosystem.

Highlights of the event included a simulated Search and Rescue operation featuring a blueflite drone working in tandem with the U.S. Coast Guard emergency response team and the USCG helicopter. In the demo, the drone

located a missing vessel, dropped a beacon and strobe light, and effectively acted as a rapid-response tool in life-saving missions. Other missions included a water sampling demonstration led by Northwestern Michigan College's Water Studies Institute and UAS program, and bathymetric mapping of the lakebed using LiDAR-equipped drones from Frontier Precision—showcasing the versatility of drone technologies in environmental research and monitoring. Opening remarks were delivered by representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation, Office of Future Mobility and Electrification, Newlab, Northwestern Michigan College, and Traverse Connect.

The event was attended by approximately 100 individuals and received good press coverage.



[SKYLINE & SHORELINE: Drone tech advances in rescue, research here – Traverse City Record Eagle, May 2025](#)

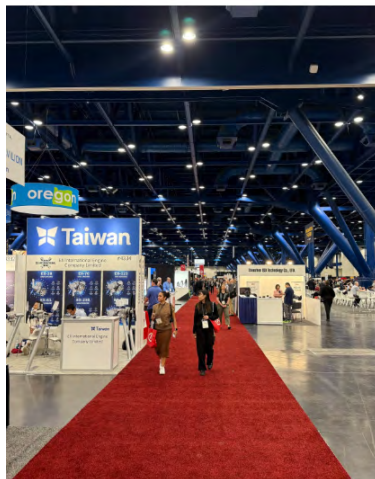
[Blueflite showcases cutting-edge drone technology – Vertical Mag, May 2025](#)

[Traverse Connect shows how drones can be used in Northern Michigan - 9&10 News, May 2025](#)

Target Market Engagement

XPONENTIAL

Traverse Connect was represented in Houston, TX, at [XPONENTIAL 2025](#), the leading conference for uncrewed systems and autonomous technology. Hosted by AUVSI (Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International), XPONENTIAL convenes global industry leaders to explore emerging tech, policy, and integration challenges. Traverse Connect and the northern Michigan NorthSky Consortium exhibited under the Michigan Pavilion, organized by MEDC, showcasing Northern Michigan's growing role in advanced aerial mobility, research, and business attraction. With XPONENTIAL coming to Detroit in 2026, this was a key opportunity to attract new AAM businesses and position the region as a destination for autonomy and aerial mobility innovation.



Regional Strategic Priority

BUSINESS EXPANSION

HELPING COMPANIES GROW AND SCALE IN THE GRAND TRAVERSE REGION

CENTURY, LLC

Century, LLC – City of Traverse City

Century, LLC, the Traverse City-based group of three manufacturing companies, Century Specialties, Century Sun, and Clark Manufacturing, has secured a seven-year, \$46 million contract with Bell Flight to produce main rotor shafts for their civil helicopters.

Cherry Republic – Leelanau County

The Make it in Michigan program announced its support of [Cherry Republic's expansion](#) in Empire Township, which will create 20 family-sustaining job opportunities. The project is a \$3.25million expansion which will add 16,000 to the existing 25,000 square foot facility.



Grand Traverse State Bank – Traverse City and Traverse City DDA District

Grand Traverse State Bank (GTSB) completed an acquisition of First State Bank of Decatur, the oldest chartered bank in the state of Michigan, with total assets of \$54 million. In early 2025, GTSB will seek regulatory approval to offer full-service banking to the region under the name Grand Traverse State Bank

JanTec, Inc. – Garfield Township

JanTec Inc., manufacturer of material handling and conveyor equipment & systems, purchased B&T Bearing Inc., a producer of ball transfer units, conveyor rollers and cargo handling equipment out of Louisville, Ky. The acquisition will allow JanTec to offer customers an expanded, engineered solution for their material handling needs, and B&T Bearings customers gain access to JanTec's handling and conveyance solutions.



Promethient – Garfield Township

Promethient, the locally-based startup company, recently finalized the installation of their Thermavance quick-touch heating and cooling climate control technology in 400 premium comfort seats at the Detroit Tigers' Comerica Park.

Regional Strategic Priority

BUSINESS GROWTH & RETENTION

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY

20FATHOMS' SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

In November 2023, 20Fathoms, our regional ecosystem partner supporting entrepreneurs and technology start-ups, received a Small Business Support Hubs grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. The funding is helping support [20Fathoms' expansion](#) to offer its services to small businesses in all ten counties of Northwest Michigan, including Manistee, Charlevoix, Cadillac, and Petoskey. The support also means that Northwest Michigan entrepreneurs can access new funding and resources through its new partnerships with Michigan SBDC, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance, Venture North, and Traverse Connect. New services include grants, business consultations, educational programming, and professional service provider support. All entrepreneurs in Northwest Michigan are eligible.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: FRACTIONAL INSIGHTS

by 20Fathoms

Before taking the leap to become a founder and business owner, Erin Eatough was an academic. It might seem like a leap, but the research foundations she took from the academic world have informed her work in the private sector and shaped the services that her company, Fractional Insights, offers.

Fractional Insights is a “consulting, advisory, and research company founded by two organizational psychologists,” Eatough explains. “Our goal is to be able to help organizations understand and measure the connection between their people and their ultimate business outcome and goals.”

Fractional Insights offers consulting services for companies, helping them adapt to the future of work. While historically there has been a disconnect between HR and business outcomes, the rise of AI and conversations around the future of work have highlighted the need for the insights and services that Fractional Insights provides.



20Fathoms Interview with Founder Erin Eatough

20Fathoms: How did you make the move from academia to starting your own company?

Erin: My cofounder Shonna Waters and I were seeing the world change to be more technology-driven and more AI-driven; we saw an opportunity to be useful. We could help companies see the alignment between people and business outcomes, really explaining, demonstrating, and proving that the way to get to your North Star goal is not in conflict with or mutually exclusive of dignified treatment of your people and investing in your people, rather it's an incredibly powerful strategy. The historical perspective is that “it increases cost,” but what we know from organizational science is that it's a business investment that pays off. That's where the science-to-practice gap is so clear. It was this point of frustration and motivation for us.

20Fathoms: When you think about 3-5 years in the future, what's your vision for your company? Where are you heading?

Erin: We are planning to continue advisory and professional services while scaling into a technology-enabled company to increase access for organizations. We are building a platform that seamlessly integrates AI-powered analytics with our Psychological Ergonomics™ framework to drive measurable organizational transformation. The platform combines an adaptive intelligence engine that analyzes workforce signals and data and generates tailored, evidence-based strategies, with a comprehensive measurement system that tracks metrics and connects them to business performance. This creates a scalable solution that automatically adapts to an organization's context while continuously optimizing workforce strategy through data-driven

Regional Strategic Priority: The Entrepreneurial Economy

insights and targeted interventions. However, our vision is to always have what we call “service in the loop” where expert support is looped into client success and the process, using technology to its highest and best use, and humans to theirs.

20Fathoms: How has working with 20Fathoms supported you as you’ve launched and grown your business?

Erin: I was a coworking member for about two years, which was amazing – it helped me see that there were resources around me for taking a leap out of the traditional employment status to becoming an entrepreneur. Having exposure to the community and resources that 20Fathoms played a big part in building my confidence to make a decision as big as leaving my job to start my own company.

I’ve completed a ton of the educational programming, like the Business Essentials course, the CO.STARTERS bootcamp, and I’ve tapped into other resources within the 20Fathoms community, like Aurora Patents. I have attended a lot of lunch and learns; I’m invested in continual personal development and growth. Especially when it comes to entrepreneurship – what else can I learn? I want to take advantage of the resources being offered.

TCNewTech was great; one reason that I wanted to do TCNewTech was because of the wraparound coaching to help you craft your pitch. I really took advantage and think it helped tremendously. [Fractional Insights took the top prize at TCNewTech last November.]

20Fathoms: Speaking of, congrats on winning the TCNewTech pitch competition last November! What was meaningful for you about the experience?

Erin: Beyond the win, sharing the stage with remarkable founders like Erin Blohm from Blooma, Jamie Kramer from Earthly After, and Brittanie Dabney of Ecosphere Organics was so meaningful. Each one of these brilliant women (and their teams) is tackling crucial challenges with powerful solutions. It was wonderful that we won, and also the line in the sand between any one of us could have shifted. I could have seen any one of them winning.

One of the most personally important parts of the whole experience was having my children in the audience. They usually just see me behind a laptop, missing family moments for “work.” At TCNewTech, they got to witness the impact and value of the sacrifices Shonna and I are making for our vision. They saw our work being recognized and celebrated by the community. And they got to hold a giant check!



MIT'S REGIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACCELERATION PROGRAM

Traverse Connect’s Director of Ecosystem Development, Camille Hoisington, is participating in MIT’s Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (MIT REAP) Global Program. She is one of twelve representatives making up Team Michigan, which was selected to join Cohort 11 of this prestigious two-year initiative aimed at accelerating innovation-driven entrepreneurship (IDE). Representing northwest lower Michigan, Camille joins a cross-sector group of leaders championed by Ben Marchionna, Michigan’s Chief Innovation Ecosystem Officer. The team includes stakeholders from government, academia, the private sector, risk capital, and the entrepreneurial community. Together, they will apply MIT’s evidence-based frameworks to strengthen Michigan’s statewide innovation ecosystem. Seven global teams are participating in this cohort, and Michigan’s inclusion highlights its growing momentum as a leader in entrepreneurial ecosystem development. The team completed their first three-day workshop in Cambridge, MA, in November, with an upcoming workshop in June, marking the beginning of their collaborative efforts to transform Michigan’s economic landscape through IDE.



Michigan Selected for Prestigious MIT REAP Global Program – MEDC, December 2024

Regional Strategic Priority: The Entrepreneurial Economy

20FATHOMS' EXPANDING STARTUP PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Coaching Services Available in Five Northwest Michigan Locations

In January, 20Fathoms announced an expansion of its one-on-one startup coaching opportunities to Elk Rapids and Petoskey. Startup coaching continues to be available in Traverse City, Manistee, and Benzonia. The service expansion allows entrepreneurs along the coastline to access this valuable service.

The coaches at 20Fathoms know how challenging being an entrepreneur is, and how valuable it can be to sit down with someone to talk through your ideas and challenges when you're starting a business. This service is open to all entrepreneurs and available at no cost as the program is underwritten by grant funding.

Startup coaches share their time, wisdom, and connections to help entrepreneurs build successful businesses and avoid common mistakes. They can help entrepreneurs with troubleshooting, opportunity and gap analysis, resources, connections, and getting clear about strategic priorities.

Two of the recent bootcamps hosted by 20Fathoms were specifically designed to meet the needs of Indigenous entrepreneurs. The Indigenous Business & Marketing Essentials bootcamp is hosted in partnership with New Mexico Community Capital and incorporates culture and tradition alongside business education.



Benzonia

When: Third Thursday of the month
4 – 6 pm

Where: Grow Benzie
5885 Frankfort Hwy, Benzonia, MI

Manistee

When: Third Wednesday of the month
9 – 11 am

Where: Man. Area Chamber of Comm.
400 River St, Manistee, MI

Traverse City

When: Every Thursday
1 – 4 pm

Where: 20Fathoms
10850 E. Traverse Hwy, Ste. 4400,
Traverse City, MI

Elk Rapids

When: Third Wednesday of the month
1 – 3 pm

Where: Waterside Office Building
212 River St, Elk Rapids, MI

Petoskey

When: Second Wednesday of the month

2:30 – 4 pm
Where: Honor Bank
Petoskey Commercial Loan Center
407 Michigan St, Petoskey, MI

Breakfast Lab Weekly Entrepreneur Event Series Continues This Summer

In early 2025, 20Fathoms introduced Breakfast Lab, a weekly series designed for entrepreneurs to tackle their most pressing issues with support from subject matter experts and peer entrepreneurs.

Whether entrepreneurs are just starting out with an idea or ready to start up, Breakfast Lab takes their business model to the next level.

Workshops begin at 9 AM, followed by work time and coaching from 10:30 to noon. Participants are welcome to attend either session or both, depending on their needs. Participants must have a completed business model canvas (business plan) in order to attend.

Each weekly workshop focuses on a particular topic and entrepreneurs can choose to attend all or selected topics that are relevant to them. Each topic will be offered on a rotational basis, and participants are welcome to attend as often as they'd like to continue to refine their work. Topics include customer discovery, marketing & sales, cost, revenue & financial modeling, MVP/product-market fit, fundraising, and storytelling & pitching.

Interested entrepreneurs can learn more and register on [20Fathoms' Breakfast Lab page](#).

Regional Strategic Priority: The Entrepreneurial Economy

20FATHOMS CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: 8BIT INSIGHTS

by 20Fathoms

Data consultant Sabrina Jordan has done it all; from data architecture to data engineering, data analysis and reporting, her career has taken her across a wide range of industries. That experience serves her well in her new role as entrepreneur. She founded her own consulting company, 8bit Insights, in 2024.

Rewind four years. In 2020, Sabrina took a job at Blue Granite Consulting. “That’s where I fell in love with consulting,” she reflects. “I felt like I’d found my niche. It was the best company I’d ever worked for, and I was very excited about it. I felt fulfilled every day when I went to work.” Two years later, the company was acquired. Sabrina didn’t feel aligned anymore, and decided to launch her own business, rooted in her values. Instead of a privately-owned company, she planned to operate as employee-owned.



As she journeyed down this path, Sabrina wanted to network and connect with other women, especially women who understood how challenging it is to start your own business. That led her to Women in Tech, a monthly networking happy hour hosted by 20Fathoms at Earthen Ales. “Getting clients, finding funding, just being in this male-dominated space, I knew there would be fantastic insights at this type of a gathering, and a community and camaraderie that would hopefully bring success to all of us,” she says.

20Fathoms Interview with Founder Sabrina Jordan

20Fathoms: What is 8bit Insights? What does it look like for someone to work with you?

Sabrina Jordan: Almost every business has data problems that they don’t know how to approach. Maybe they have multiples systems and the data doesn’t talk to each other; they might have really burning business questions they don’t know how to answer because inventory data and sales data are in different places. Having a data consultant come in that can build them a system that can answer those questions is the greatest value I can think of.

When someone gets in touch, we do a discovery call; I introduce myself briefly but we spend most of the time getting into the challenges they face, the questions they want to answer, digging into their needs.

If it looks like they are going to be a good fit, and I have possible solutions, we talk about a proposal and there might be more discovery calls to ensure what I am proposing will work, we check in throughout the process, and there’s a wrap up call at the end.

A lot of consulting companies want you to keep coming back but I ensure you have the skills to continue independently. If you want to come back for another project it’s because you trust us, not because you didn’t have another choice.

20Fathoms: What’s your vision for your company?

Sabrina: Ultimately I’d love to have 64 employees. That’s the point at which I feel you can have a completely flat hierarchy. It’s also a data joke!

I feel like it’s the best number of people to stay connected, where you can fall back on each other and have questions, get expertise, ensure that everyone in the company is able to be the best that they can be. They’re not forgotten, they’re not overlooked or lacking support. To me that’s the right size before you start to get too big.

I’m looking for sustainable growth, looking for an equilibrium instead of constant growth and striving. For some companies if you just keep striving for growth you end up never hitting the mark on a great culture or satisfied clients.

I would love to have a sustainable company that pays employees really well and has the best benefits you can get by staying small and agile and targeted.

20Fathoms: How did you get involved with Women in Tech? What made you decide to come out for the first time?

Sabrina: I was hoping to network with other women – especially those who understand how difficult it is to get started with your own business, to get clients, find funding, and be in a traditionally male-dominated space. I knew there would be fantastic insights, and community/camaraderie that would hopefully bring success to all of us.

20Fathoms: What has come out of your involvement with Women in Tech?

Regional Strategic Priority: Business Growth & Retention

Sabrina: First and foremost, my amazing branding and website! I had tried to do my own website and logo, and it was fine, but when I met Jaime [Edmondson] at Women in Tech and she started talking about how she was looking for clients to get started and was offering a special, I looked at her website Spellbound Creative Studio. I was so blown away by the quality, comparing it to my own.

I didn't feel legitimate with the website I'd built myself... it looked like all the others. Jaime's process helped me define my business more than I ever thought I would need to define it. We got so involved in the details and really honed in on what makes 8bit so unique from the competition.

It was more than just a brand and a website; it helped me understand who I am and who my company is. That never would have happened if it weren't for Women in Tech. I wouldn't have sought it out; I would have assumed it would be too expensive.

At Women in Tech, the people who have showed up have come from all sorts of different walks of life, different places in their life, from college students who have questions about what it's like to work in tech to retired people who are looking to start another business in tech or continue a side project. That variety is what makes the community so strong and gives you so much insight that can help you out. Despite that huge variety, there's such a strong bond in the women who show up. That's what makes it so valuable and rewarding.

20FATHOMS' PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: WOMEN IN TECH

Each month Women in Tech gathers to build community and support amongst women working in, or interested in, the tech industry and tech-related roles.

"It can be intimidating for women to show up to a meetup, so we keep it as casual as possible," says Gretchen Swanson, Director of Talent at 20Fathoms and Women in Tech's regular host. "The only agenda is that there's no agenda!"

Women in Tech was founded in 2020 by two local tech professionals at the time, Courtney Bierschbach and Cotopaxi Lyon, in partnership with 20Fathoms. The goal was to expand networking opportunities, provide support, and discuss shared challenges and experiences. Five years later, the group is still going strong.

Gatherings are often made up of half-new and half-returning women. This dynamic mix ensures that everyone has someone to talk to, new connections are consistently made, and no one needs to feel hesitant breaking into an established group.

Women in Tech gathers on the third Wednesday of the month at 5 pm at Earthen Ales.



Regional Strategic Priority

TALENT ATTRACTION & GROWTH

DEVELOPING A ROBUST TALENT PIPELINE

TALENT ATTRACTION: MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE COAST SUPPLEMENTAL

Traverse Connect continues to build upon the Michigan's Creative Coast talent attraction campaign and introduced several new statistical reports that convey the value of Michigan's Creative Coast programs with metrics such as job views, successful moves, successful hires, new businesses started, and the top national out-of-state origins of the program applicants. The recently published Michigan's Creative Coast Job Board Report details metrics and testimonials which convey the value of this program. The report covers job views, successful relocations, new hires, new businesses started, and the top local and out-of-state origins of the program applicants.

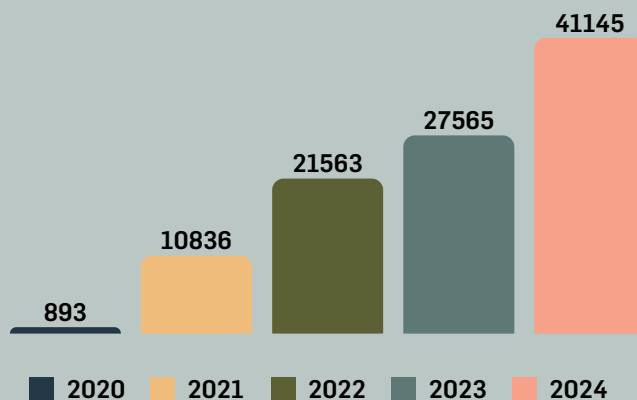


JOB BOARD PERFORMANCE REPORT

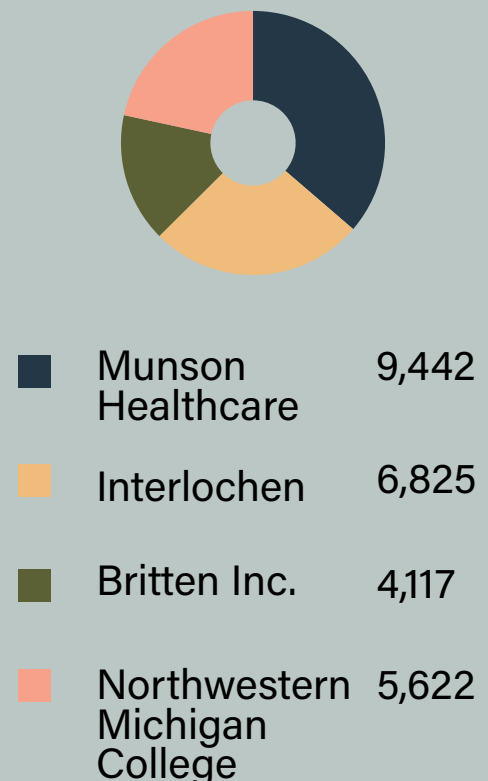
GROWING FAMILY SUSTAINING CAREERS IN THE GRAND TRAVERSE REGION

The Michigan's Creative Coast Job Board is a high-quality and curated showcase of key employers and family-sustaining job opportunities available in the Grand Traverse region. Curation of the job board is defined around pay rate parameters to ensure alignment with Traverse Connect's mission to encourage the growth of family-sustaining careers in the region.

JOB VIEWS OVER TIME



JOB VIEWS PER MAJOR EMPLOYER



"When I started job searching, I always looked through the job board posts. I saw the position almost immediately after it was posted. My boss still jokes about how fast she got an email from me following the post! We connected via email, scheduled an interview and I was hired later that week."

TESTIMONIAL 2022

REACH & IMPACT

TOP USER LOCATIONS

Traverse City, MI
Ashburn, VA
Houston, TX
Dallas, TX
Atlanta, GA
Miami, FL
Garfield Township
Moses Lake, WA
San Antonio, TX
Detroit, MI
Charlotte, NC
Des Moines, IA
Orlando, FL
Chicago, IL

“Loved the platform, super easy to use and great candidates came through!”

3,418
AVG. JOB VIEWS/MONTH

#1
MOST VIEWED PAGE

108,225
PAGE VIEWS IN 2024

I've always enjoyed swiping through the Creative Coast job posts to see the diverse opportunities in the Traverse City area. Recently, I found a great position with National Vacuum Equipment that I was interested in. I followed through to meet them in person at the Northwestern Michigan College career fair, applied, and got the job!

TESTIMONIAL 2021

“The job board is valuable as we have had candidates apply from other areas of the state and have had more visibility since using.”

NORTHERN NAVIGATORS PROGRAM REPORT

OPENING THE DOORS OF GRAND TRAVERSE TO NEW IDEAS, PEOPLE & GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES.

Acting as "regional ambassadors," our Northern Navigators are people who have chosen to live in the Grand Traverse region and who can help prospective residents, newcomers to the area, and locals alike feel welcomed and connected, all while offering knowledge of regional lifestyle amenities, recreation, schools, healthcare, real estate, and industry and career opportunities. Some are Traverse area locals, others have made the choice to recently move here themselves, and all of them can offer their advice from their unique experiences.

300+
**MEETINGS
TO DATE**

15
**LOCAL
AMBASSADORS**

26,973
**WEB VIEWS
IN 2024**

INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED

- Business & Corporate
- Real Estate
- Healthcare
- Education
- Remote
- Nonprofit
- Arts & Culture
- Tech & Entrepreneurship

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Career Opportunities
- Real Estate & Housing
- Childcare
- Entrepreneurship & Tech
- Making Friends & Getting Involved
- Outdoor Recreation
- Food & Beverage Scene
- Leadership Development

TESTIMONIALS OVER THE YEARS

"The Northern Navigator program is a priceless resource and a reflection of the type of supportive community that defines Traverse City. She kindly facilitated connections to other community members and provided a thorough list of resources for networking opportunities. I can't think of anything to improve - the program is already above and beyond my initial expectations!"

"We reached out to multiple organizations in Michigan, but it was the Michigan's Creative Coat program in Traverse City that stood out by providing us with excellent resources, including the outstanding Northern Navigators. Impressed by their expertise, we arranged another call focused on our interests in outdoor activities and community involvement. From our perspective, Northern Navigators has proven to be an exceptional resource, and we enthusiastically recommend their services to everyone we meet."

"This is the coolest and most helpful resource I could've asked for. What an incredible thing to offer people considering a move to your city. It seems that Northern Navigators are quite a diverse bunch, but it was awesome for me to meet with someone who I feel like I have a lot in common with. Such a fan of Camille and this great service!"



NORTHERN EXPLORERS PROGRAM REPORT

WELCOMING NEWCOMERS & BOOMERANGS TO THE GRAND TRAVERSE REGION

Since 2021, the Northern Explorers program aims to attract talent to the Grand Traverse region through targeted invitations and networking opportunities. Once per year, Traverse Connect and Michigan's Creative Coast invite 10 individuals from outside the Grand Traverse region to visit as our VIP guests and attend two special events. These individuals are featured with their bio and resume to the Traverse Connect and Michigan's Creative Coast audiences leading up to the events. Notably, several participants have been successfully hired by local organizations, contributing to the region's workforce diversity and economic vitality.

42

**PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS**

20

**SUCCESSFUL
MOVES**

2

**NEW BUSINESSES
STARTED**

5

**SUCCESSFUL
HIRES**

"Shortly after my move to Traverse City, Michigan from Chicago, Illinois, I heard of Michigan's Creative Coast and was extended the opportunity to attend the [Northern Explorer program]. This program consisted of mentorship and exposure in the Grand Traverse region that allowed me to secure a role with Britten Inc. as a Content Manager. I have been embracing the transition from big corporate to a local family-owned business. I am grateful for this opportunity and excited to live in a city I grew up loving!"

TESTIMONIAL 2021

REACH & IMPACT

OUT-OF-STATE ORIGINS

Atlanta, GA
Baltimore, MD
Charlotte, NC
Cincinnati, OH
Denver, CO
Houston, TX
Indianapolis, IN
Juneau, AK
Los Angeles, CA
Minneapolis, MN
Nashville, TN
United Kingdom

IN-STATE ORIGINS

Detroit
Grand Rapids
Holland
Kalamazoo
Royal Oak
Saginaw AND MORE...

HIRED BY

- Britten Inc.
- Community Foundation
- Northwest Education Services
- World Magnetics
- Glen Lake Association

"Just this week I closed on a house thanks to much support from Meg Zammit. The Northern Explorers program introduced me to Northern Navigators who encouraged me to pursue remote opportunities and introduced me to Meg, who helped me find my home in the community. I'm really looking forward to moving back to the area and getting reconnected with the community. Looking forward to being able to call Michigan home again!"

TESTIMONIAL 2022

