

ANNUAL REPORT

2025



LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND THE CEO

We are happy to share the 2025 Annual Report, offering an expansive yet brief glimpse into the wide range of accomplishments and progress made to foster our region’s economic growth and the prosperity of all who call the Grand Traverse region home.

This past year is one for the history books. The first medical drone delivery project for the region took place last spring and will soon resume with additional phases of expanded flights between Munson Healthcare facilities. The Freshwater Research and Innovation Center, powered by the collaborative efforts of Northwestern Michigan College, Discovery Pier, 20Fathoms, Michigan Technological University, and Traverse Connect, broke ground and is on track to open in 2027. These two accomplishments, among many others this past year, will be seen as first steps in a transformative economic, technological, and manufacturing trajectory for the region and the state.

In our ongoing commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment where entrepreneurship and companies of any size can thrive, we continue to make significant strides as a powerful voice in Lansing through the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, an even larger partnership of 20 member organizations. Collaborating with local businesses, entrepreneurs, and educational institutions has boosted economic diversity and



Bill Myers
CHAIR
TRAVERSE CONNECT

Warren Call
PRESIDENT AND CEO
TRAVERSE CONNECT

attracted talent, ensuring our wide range of industries are flourishing and ready for future growth. In 2025, Traverse Connect made 581 direct business-to-business referrals, welcomed 130 new member businesses, and conducted over 1,445 employer outreach and retention visits.

As you peruse the pages of this year’s report, it’s critical to acknowledge the role of our investors, business leaders, elected officials, and community partners in these accomplishments.

As partners in our mission, your support has helped us grow to become one of the leading chamber and economic development organizations.

Now, as we begin our seventh year as the lead economic development organization for the Grand Traverse region, its future is vibrant and bustling thanks to an economic engine powered by a wide range of industries.

Thank you for investing in our region’s future. On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of Traverse Connect, we wish you another year of prosperity and growth for your organizations.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR

Bill Myers
Promethient

PAST CHAIR

Rachel Johnson
Cherryland Electric Cooperative

VICE CHAIR & TREASURER

Kevin Klein
Northwest Regional Airport Authority

SECRETARY

Dan Buron
Goodwill Northern Michigan

FINANCE CHAIR

Norm Plumstead
Honor Bank

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS CHAIR

Gabe Schneider
Northern Strategies 360

Nate Alger
Grand Traverse County

Michael Brown
Burdco Inc.

Cortney Danbrook
Danbrook Adams
Raymond, PLC

Trey Devey
Interlochen Center for the
Arts

Doug DeYoung
Consumers Energy

Brandie Ekren
Traverse City Light & Power

Laura Galbraith
Venture North Funding &
Development

Tim Healy
Century, LLC

Don Howe
Truly Free

Nick Jacqmain
Springfield Inc.

Russ Knopp
Comfort Keepers

Benjamin Marentette
City of Traverse City

John Melcher
Crystal Mountain

Fernando Meza
Oneupweb

Suzanne Miller Allen
Blue Cross Blue Shield and
Blue Care Network of Michigan

Nick Nissley
Northwestern Michigan
College

Kacie SanMiguel
Plante Moran, PLLC

Jen Seman
Priority Health

Shelley Spencer
Munson Healthcare

Jessica Sullivan
Legado Family Office
Management

Whitney Waara
Traverse City Tourism



YEAR IN REVIEW

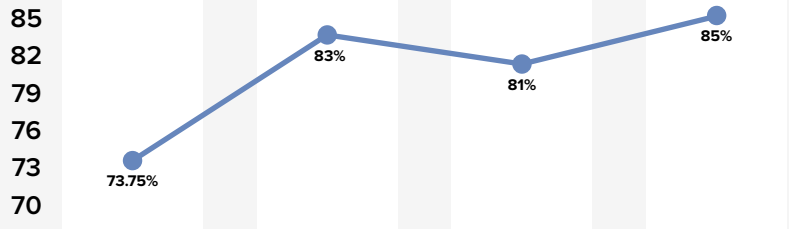
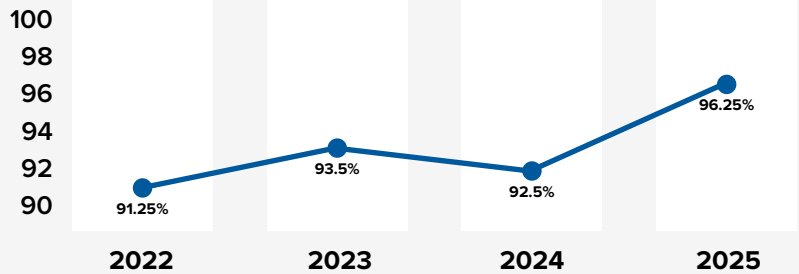
GROWTH BAROMETER STATS

Traverse Connect conducts a quarterly Business Growth Barometer Survey of investor and member businesses to provide a snapshot of 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.

Respondents to the quarterly survey throughout 2025 overwhelmingly felt that the region is a good place to grow their business. The survey also requests respondents to measure how the region is improving as a place to grow their business. Traverse Connect observed a significant improvement from 2024 in the first three surveys of the year, with a decline at the end of the year. As the new year approached, Traverse Connect attributed the difference to affordability concerns related to inflation and capital access costs, as well as decreases in state and federal funding from fourth-quarter budgets and the clawback of work project funding from Michigan's 2024-2025 budget.

Is our region a good place to grow your business?



Is our region IMPROVING as a place to grow your business?

TOP ISSUES

<p>STAFFING Finding Talent/New Hires</p>	<p>ATTAINABLE HOUSING</p>	INFLATION
		STAFFING – Skill Gaps
		ACCESS TO CAPITAL

REGIONAL DASHBOARD

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



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

\$71,664



STATE AVERAGE WAGE PERCENTAGE
2030 GOAL: 90%

87%



BUSINESS GROWTH



INVESTOR STATS

“As a host of a ribbon cutting, my staff and I enjoyed the excitement of celebrating something out of the day-to-day. I think it was also beneficial to showcase items that, maybe, potential customers didn't know we carry.”

— **WENDY FALKNER**
Kilwins Traverse City

“I love to let people know what a great group of people that are a part of this community you have! Everyone has made me feel so welcomed and willing to help with anything. I absolutely loved the last Coffee Connection, it really hit home with me.”

— **AMBER SMITH**
Wolverine Cabinet Company

Business referrals to investor businesses:

581



Business Outreach & Retention Visits from Staff & Ambassadors:

1,445



New Investors:

130



Searches of Investor Directory:

1,166,024



Referrals to investor websites from our business directory:

9194



“The ribbon cutting for PoWeR! Book Bags provided a dynamic opportunity for more members of the business community to become aware of and visit our non-profit Volunteer Center. At the event, we connected with new area businesses that later became partners with us!”

— **KARA GREGORY**
PoWeR! Book Bags



NETWORKING & EVENTS

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING INVESTORS

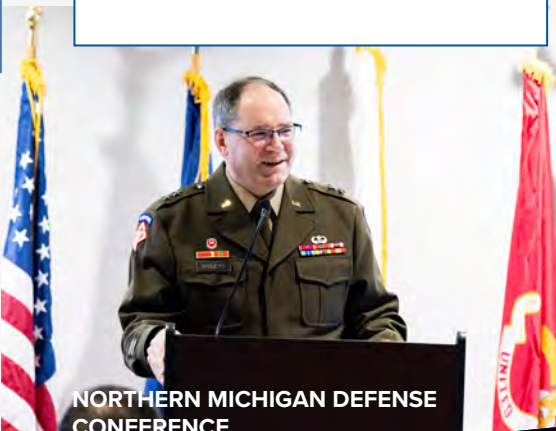
Attendees at 2025 Events:

4,750



NORTHERN MICHIGAN POLICY CONFERENCE

RESHORE



NORTHERN MICHIGAN DEFENSE CONFERENCE

ANNUAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT



NORTHERN MICHIGAN BUSINESS GALA

GOLF OUTING



ECONOMIC STRATEGY SESSION



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD LUNCHEON

INVESTOR HIGHLIGHTS



Burdco

Through Traverse Connect, Burdco has built meaningful relationships with fellow business leaders, public-sector partners, and economic-development organizations that directly support smarter site selection, better project planning, and more informed investment decisions for our clients.

We appreciate Traverse Connect's leadership in strengthening Northern Michigan's business climate and are proud to be part of an organization committed to sustainable growth, talent retention, and long-term regional prosperity.

[Learn More](#)



Cary Stamp

Once we decided to explore opening a new office in the area, we discovered Traverse Connect and the incredible programs they offer. We jumped in right away—joined, scheduled a ribbon-cutting, and started showing up at events.

Our involvement with Traverse Connect—and the encouragement and support from their team—has been a huge part of our growth. Today, we have our own building, we've expanded and upgraded our team, and we're excited about many years ahead.

[Learn More](#)



EverGROWTH Consulting

Brenda and the Traverse Connect team consistently show up as true partners—taking time to listen, understand my evolving needs, and make thoughtful connections. Those relationships have been mutually beneficial, strengthening my business while also supporting the organizations and leaders I serve.

Traverse Connect does more than bring people together. It fosters trust, encourages collaboration, and helps businesses grow with intention. I am deeply grateful for the role Traverse Connect has played in my journey and for the continued investment they make in the people behind the logo.

[Learn More](#)



Rehmann

Traverse Connect has played a pivotal role in supporting Rehmann's growth throughout the northern Michigan. By investing in Traverse Connect, we gain access to a powerful platform that connects our business advisors with influential decision-makers across a wide range of industries. These relationships not only elevate our visibility in the market but also create meaningful opportunities that allow us to better serve clients and pursue strategic growth.

For Rehmann, supporting Traverse Connect is far more than a membership – it is a deliberate investment in the long-term health and prosperity of the region we proudly call home. As Traverse Connect continues to champion economic vitality, talent development, and business growth, its success directly influences our own.

[Learn More](#)

ADVOCACY



PREPARING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY FOR THE IMPACTS OF EARNED SICK TIME AND MINIMUM WAGE LAWS

The first quarter was dominated by a flurry of legislative action surrounding the Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA), advocating for much-needed adjustments to the law. After months of appeals, an amended law took effect on February 21, 2025.

STATE OF THE STATE ADVOCACY DAYS

Traverse Connect joined its Alliance partners for its traditional visit to the State of the State festivities, meeting with regional legislators and key leaders to advocate for critical appropriations that would benefit northern Michigan.



STANDING STRONG FOR NORTHERN MICHIGAN DURING BUDGET DEBATE

Throughout the extended negotiations of Michigan's 2025-26 budget, the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance remained focused on protecting the vitality of rural economies and northern Michigan communities.

After advocating for northern Michigan's role in generating billions in economic activity, the final budget cut significant funds for economic development and business programs.



2025 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE DISAPPROVAL VOTE

In December, the Michigan House Appropriations Committee disapproved \$645 million in FY 2025 work projects, including more than \$56 million designated for northern Michigan.

The Alliance is urging its representatives in the Northern Caucus to advocate for restoring \$56 million in funding for projects that support small businesses, families, and workforce development in northern Michigan.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE DIRECTOR

In September, Dakota Baker joined Traverse Connect as the new Director of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, also advocating on behalf of businesses represented by Traverse Connect. Dakota has spent his career in political and public policy work in Michigan.

REGIONAL ECONOMY



Regional Economic Ecosystem

ADVANCED AIR MOBILITY

Traverse Connect is advancing the vision of establishing the Grand Traverse Region as a national hub for commercial drone innovation and workforce development. In collaboration with regional partners in projects like [medical drone delivery](#), we are steadily building the infrastructure, [partnerships](#), and programs needed to support this growing Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) sector—from FAA-certified workforce training and Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) corridors to real-world testing environments and a thriving startup ecosystem. With a strategic focus on developing this industry cluster, Traverse Connect and its partners in the [Northsky Consortium](#) and the Northsky Uncrewed Innovation Zone are committed to positioning Northern Michigan as a leader in uncrewed aerial systems (UAS), strengthening local industries, and attracting national attention and investment.

MICHIGAN'S BLUETECH INNOVATION HUB

- Northern Michigan continues to strengthen its position as a rising center for freshwater and ocean innovation, achieving several key milestones these past few months through the collective efforts of Michigan's BlueTech Innovation Hub partners, including Traverse Connect, [Northwestern Michigan College](#), [Discovery Pier](#), [20Fathoms](#), and [FishPass](#).
- Traverse City's freshwater innovation community had a strong presence at OCEANS 2025, hosting the "[Michigan's BlueTech Innovation Hub](#)" booth to showcase the region's emerging leadership in blue technology and freshwater research.
- In September, the region celebrated a major milestone with the official groundbreaking of the \$28.9 million, 38,000-square-foot [Freshwater Research and Innovation Center](#), which will unite working pier space, advanced laboratories, and business incubation under one roof.

RESHORE: INNOVATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF WATER, MOBILITY, AND OUTDOOR TECH

Traverse Connect, in partnership with MichAuto, hosted [ReShore](#) on August 18 at Elk Rapids Marina and Discovery Pier in Traverse City. The event brought together innovators, industry leaders, and policymakers to showcase Northern Michigan's leadership in bluetech, outdoor recreation, uncrewed air and marine systems, and future mobility. In December, Traverse Connect was named MichAuto's Partner of the Year for our collaboration. Look for ReShore's return in July 2026.



BUSINESS EXPANSION

Atlas Space Operations, our locally-grown pioneer in ground software for satellite communications, announced a strategic partnership and acquisition by York Space Systems, a defense space technology company

World Magnetics launched World Magnetics Distribution to serve North America's manufacturing with sensing and switch solutions. It also acquired Royal Distributors, Inc. (RDI), a trusted partner in medical, transportation, and industrial markets.

COMMUNITY STARTUP 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. 20Fathoms' entrepreneurial

support includes [coaching and guidance, programs and education, and additional resources](#) such as access to capital and their popular coworking space.

PUBLIC SECTOR



Public Sector Partnerships & Regional Economic Development

- Traverse Connect continues professional services agreements to carry out economic development work with partners City of Traverse City, Charter Township of Garfield, East Bay Township, Grand Traverse County, Traverse City Downtown Development Authority, and TVC-Cherry Capital Airport. These public-private partnerships are critical to Traverse Connect's long-term efforts in entrepreneurial ecosystem development, business growth, and regional talent attraction.
- Traverse Connect East Bay Township through the Beach District Implementation Team and the creation of a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) Board—key steps in advancing public improvement projects along the US-31 Beach District Corridor: [East Bay Township Approves Corridor Improvement Authority](#)
- Traverse Connect supported East Bay Township's efforts to become a Michigan Economic Development Corporation-certified Redevelopment Ready Community by producing a [2025 Economic Development Strategy](#) and a [Marketing Plan](#) to attract and retain talent, attract business investment, and showcase its rural character and natural beauty while building community pride.



- We collaborated with the Charter Township of Garfield to survey business owners to better understand the needs, challenges, and priorities of the local business community, and to gather actionable feedback to identify opportunities to strengthen the Township's business environment and guide future economic development initiatives. The [results](#) will be used to inform data-driven strategies that support business retention, expansion, and long-term community vitality in Garfield Township.
- We are working with state lawmakers to introduce legislation to expand child care through new Child Care Micro-Centers. This unique option, first developed through a [pilot program in Leelanau County](#), allows home-regulated childcare businesses to

- operate in a facility other than a private residence, such as a local church, school, library, or community center, thereby reducing operational barriers.
- Traverse Connect and Networks Northwest jointly created the [2025 Grand Traverse Region Employer Benefits Survey](#) to address local businesses' challenge in attracting and retaining talent. In a competitive labor market, benefits are key for employers to compete and retain workers. This year, 250 employers from over a dozen sectors participated, offering a snapshot of the region's employment landscape.
- In another partnership with Networks Northwest, the [2025 NW MI Hybrid and Remote Worker Study](#) was completed to gain insights into the prevalence, preferences, challenges, needs, and demographics of remote and hybrid workers in the northwest lower Michigan region, including the fact that 35% of these workers' companies are based in Northwest Michigan – directly supporting and helping grow our regional economy. Additionally, 53% of respondents would remain in Northwest Michigan if they could no longer work remotely.



2025 PERFORMANCE REPORT

JOB BOARD

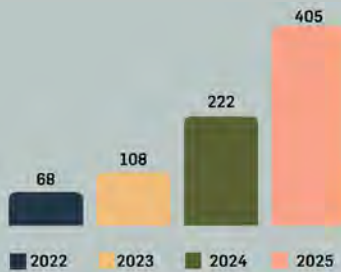
The Michigan's Creative Coast Job Board showcases key employers and family-sustaining jobs in the Grand Traverse region, curated around pay rates to support Traverse Connect's mission of growing family-sustaining careers.

JOB VIEWS OVER TIME



RESUME PACK

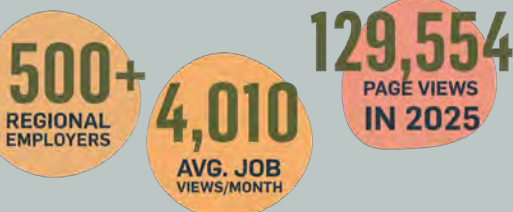
Michigan's Creative Coast Resume Pack features resumes from active job seekers across Michigan and beyond, highlighting industry, location, companies, and career interests. It offers a weekly snapshot of job seekers, students, and recent graduates looking for careers "up north."



MAKE YOUR HOME IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Traverse Connect, in partnership with the Alliance for Economic Success, Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce, Networks Northwest, Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce, and Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce received a \$59,000 grant from the Michigan Growth Office for the Make Your Home in Northwest Michigan program.

Through this program, ten individuals relocating to or securing new homes in Northwest Michigan received \$5,000 in housing assistance. All recipients have either accepted a local job offer or are currently employed by a regional business, representing a mix of newcomers and existing residents.



"It confirmed that Traverse City is exactly where I want to build the next chapter of my career and life."

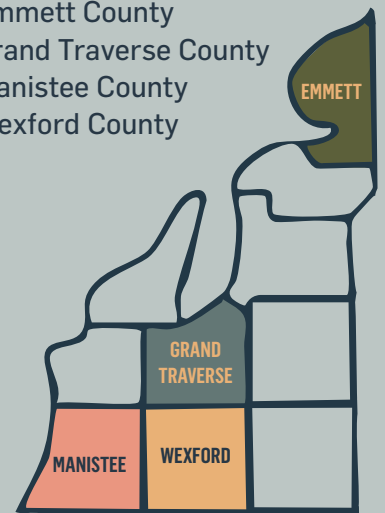
2025 NORTHERN EXPLORERS

Since 2021, Traverse Connect and Michigan's Creative Coast have invited outsiders as VIP guests to guide their move to northern Michigan. For the first time, Traverse Connect sponsored participant travel and lodging with funding from the You Can in Michigan campaign. Together with statewide talent-attraction programs, Northern Explorers continues to welcome newcomers who want to build their careers and lives here.



GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

- 2: Emmett County
- 5: Grand Traverse County
- 2: Manistee County
- 1: Wexford County



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & PROGRAMS



“ I actually learned of **TCYP** through social media when I first moved to the area. I wanted to find a way to meet other professionals and give back to the community.”

Traverse Connect, with the **Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity**, hosted **grant-writing workshops** for 43 local governments, nonprofits, and regional partners. Facilitated by Davenport University’s IPEX, these workshops cover the six grant writing stages, helping participants access capital, endowment, and operational grants.

The Spring **2025 Women’s Leadership Cohort**, facilitated by EverGROWTH Consulting, brought together more than 30 women to learn, explore, challenge, and empower through leadership development and problem-solving. Topics are customized to members’ needs and include a wide range of topics from having it all to imposter syndrome, the art of communication, and much more.

“ I am appreciative for the opportunity to participate in the Women’s Leadership Cohort. The experience challenged some of my personal perceptions and helped me gain both confidence and clarity in my leadership. In fast-paced environments where decisions and progress are prioritized and leadership roles can feel isolating, having the space to openly discuss and navigate workplace concerns with confidential feedback and support from other female leaders in our community is truly invaluable.”

— **JILL SILL**, Executive Director, Norte



Leadership Grand Traverse held its 2024-25 graduation event in February, welcoming more than 20 new alumni into the incredible group of community and business leaders who have completed this cornerstone leadership development program. The 2025 class included representatives from Britten Inc., Charter Township of Long Lake, Grand Traverse Industries, Spence Brothers, and more.

Two cohorts of the new **Speak with Courage** program, originally Let Her Speak, completed their programs in the spring and winter of 2025. This hands-on, deeply supportive class helps leaders develop their authentic voice and gain confidence as speakers in business and in life.

The Traverse City Young Professionals, created by Traverse Connect, aims to empower young professionals in the Grand Traverse area through networking and development. It focuses on social and recreational opportunities, community engagement, and personal and professional growth. In 2025, TCYP organized happy hour events and volunteering for Father Fred, the City Opera House, Food Rescue, Toys for Tots, and more.

In the fall and again in May 2026, DART Bank partnered with Traverse Connect to offer **Profit Mastery**®, a two-day workshop designed to help business owners and leaders take control of their financial future. The course, led by Colin Kin, CPA, CFA, provided attendees with the tools to interpret financial statements, make strategic decisions, and navigate challenges with confidence.



MANUFACTURING



GTAMC

FIRST NORTHERN MICHIGAN DEFENSE CONFERENCE

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 our 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.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN MANUFACTURING SUMMIT

The annual Northern Michigan Manufacturing Summit focused on digital transformation and the rapid pace of change for the region’s manufacturing sector. Industry 4.0 has been a frequent topic and focus of grant programs at the state and federal levels. Speakers at the Summit also addressed developments in artificial intelligence platforms and advancements in 3-D printing technology. Discussions also focused on workforce development and the need for skilled talent to support the growth of manufacturing in our region, a longstanding pillar of our economy.

BUSINESS EXPANSION

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

Promethient, the locally based startup, installed its Thermavance quick-touch heating and cooling climate-control technology in 400 premium comfort seats at the Detroit Tigers’ Comerica Park.

2025 MANUFACTURERS’ SURVEY RESULTS

In the first quarter, the Manufacturing Council surveyed members to understand their business needs and priorities, ensuring that Traverse Connect supports manufacturing sector growth and fosters a supportive, thriving business environment for manufacturers in the Grand Traverse region. Traverse Connect provided a survey report to Council members while sharing these key priorities for the organization:

- Advocate for legislation and policy that supports affordable housing and childcare for working families
- Support diverse housing options to support the quality of life sought by skilled and manufacturing workers
- Support the manufacturing sector with networking opportunities, succession planning, and the promotion of career opportunities in the skilled trades and advanced manufacturing.

Business Longevity:

61.1% have operated for 10–50 years.

22.2% for over 50 years.

Future Talent Needs:

55.6% anticipate needing entry-level employees (0–2 years experience with some education or certification).

Only 5.6% foresee a need for senior-level talent.

TOP BARRIERS OF GROWTH

Attainable housing

88.9%



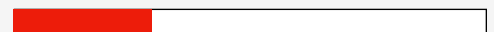
Staffing (finding talent)

61.1%



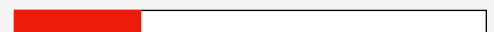
Skills gaps

33.3%



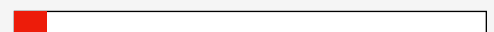
Childcare

27.8%



Inflation & trade concerns

16.7% each



Business Climate:

88.9% say the region is a good place to grow a manufacturing business.

61.1% believe it is improving.

