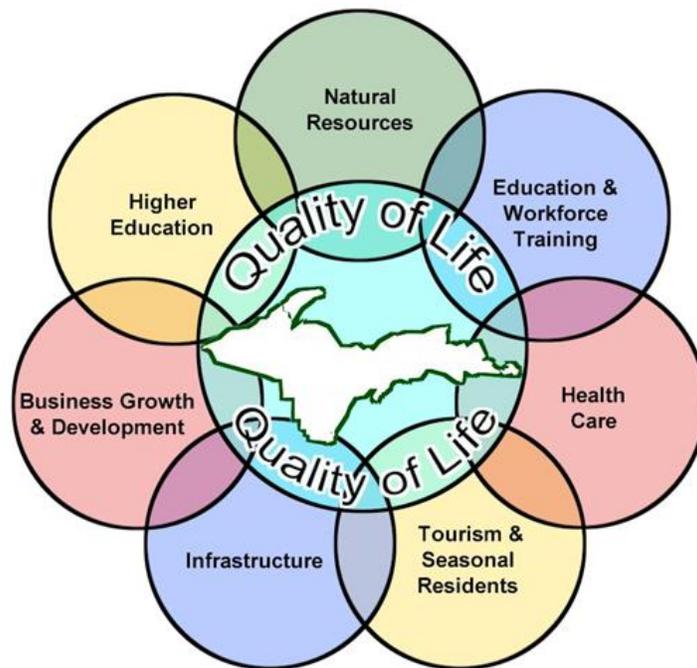




AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY STUDY FOR THE MICHIGAN UPPER PENINSULA/ WISCONSIN BORDER REGION



SEPTEMBER 2009



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Michigan Works, the Upper Peninsula Economic Development Alliance (UPEDA) and the Small Business & Technology Development Center for hiring us to conduct this study.

We would like to thank Bob Eslinger of Michigan Works for serving as the liaison between the consultants and the steering committee. As our primary point of contact, his assistance was invaluable in completing this project.

We thank the following individuals for serving on the project steering committee:

Duane Aho	James Golembeski	Phil Musser
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Robert Eslinger	Vickie Micheau	Les Wong
Don Gardner	Rod Miller	Gwen Wood
Wendy Gehlhoff	Keith Moyle	Gwen Worley
	Glen Mroz	Allan Yeck

We would also like to thank the following individuals, who scheduled and facilitated focus group interview sessions:

Doug Bovin	Laurie Jasmin	Carmen Pittenger
Don Clewley	Norman McKindles	Cheryl Schlehuber
Lois Ellis	Julie Melchori	Donna Scorse
Bob Eslinger	Vickie Micheau	Mary Smith
Wendy Gehlhoff	Phil Musser	Kim Stoker
James Hendricks	Bruce Ortttenburger	

We thank everyone who attended focus group interview sessions or consented to be interviewed on an individual basis. Approximately 200 people provided input in this manner, and their opinions and insights provide a significant part of the foundation for the recommendations contained in this report.

We thank the more than 1,600 people who took the time to respond to our online survey. This study could not have been completed without the input of the people who live in the Upper Peninsula/Wisconsin border region.

Michigan Works!/The Job Force Board, UPEDA and the Steering Committee would like to thank the following legislators for their support during the application process as well as their interest and participation during the entire study period:

The Honorable Carl Levin, U.S. Senator	Amy Berglund, Regional Representative
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, U.S. Senator	Sheri Davie, U.P. Regional Manager
The Honorable Bart Stupak, U.S. Congressman	Tom Baldini, District Director

Michigan Legislators:

The Honorable Michael Prusi, Senator, 38th Senatorial District
The Honorable Jason Allen, Senator, 37th Senatorial District
The Honorable Michael Lahti, Representative, 110th District
The Honorable Steven F. Lindberg, Representative, 109th District
The Honorable Judy Nerat, Representative, 108th District
The Honorable Gary McDowell, Representative, 107th District

This study was funded by a Regional Innovation Grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

**The entire report will be available for download
beginning September 17, 2009 at:**

www.jobforce.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

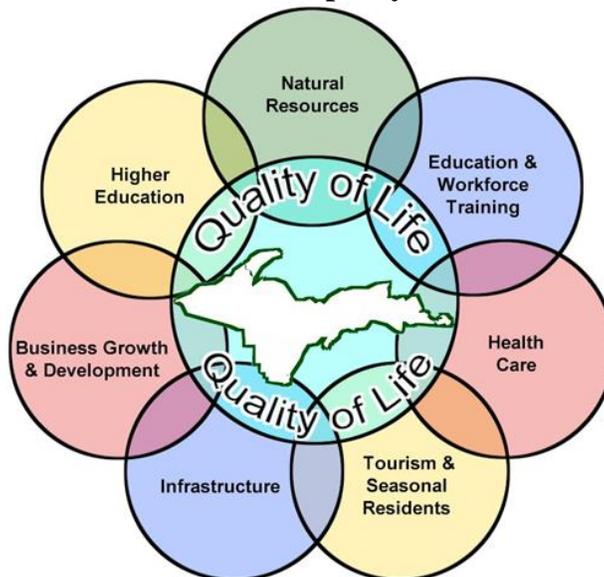
This study is a call to action to accelerate the pace of change and direction of the economy of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP) and two adjoining Wisconsin counties. This region, the UP/Wisconsin border region, faces long term economic challenges from a rapidly shifting national and global economy.

High levels of unemployment in the region, recent plant closings, layoffs, delays in investment projects, and low levels of business start ups are clear benchmarks of economic distress. In response to the current environment, leaders in the region applied for and received a Regional Innovation Grant from the United States Department of Labor for the development of a 17-county (consisting of the entire UP, plus the adjacent Wisconsin counties of Florence and Marinette) economic impact study with actionable implementation activities critical to regional economic survival. The goal of the study was to formulate strategies for regional economic and workforce development that are specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic with a timeline.

Strategies

The strategies developed for this plan cut across the entire UP/Wisconsin border region. Each county or sub-region has an interest and a direct economic benefit through the successful implementation of the strategies. Listed below are the key points to the following seven strategies developed for this plan: Higher Education, Education and Workforce, Business Growth & Development, Natural Resources, Tourism & Seasonal Residents, Infrastructure, and Health Care. The graph below incorporates these strategies in an overall economic vision aimed at increasing the economic prosperity of the region.

Figure E-1: Vision for Economic Prosperity in the UP/WI Border Region



Strategies and Tactics by Category

Higher Education – Build on the higher education cluster in the region; expand enrollment, research and entrepreneurial activity; raise educational attainment of the regions workforce;

- Support the region’s educational institutions in building programs and enrollment
- Build on the growing higher education research base to develop additional R&D programs

Education & Workforce Training - Increase the skill and education of the regional workforce to increase competitiveness

- Work to raise the overall educational attainment in the region
- Build on existing programs that increase experiential and entrepreneurial opportunities for K-12 students
- Build on existing regional workforce training programs to train or retrain workers in manufacturing, health care and specific industry clusters such as forest products, digital communications, entrepreneurship and shipbuilding

Business Growth & Development – Work to grow existing businesses and the number of new businesses; establish a region-wide culture of collaboration and innovation to attract entrepreneurs and existing business investment;

- Work to increase the growth of existing businesses and new businesses through the use of SmartZones and the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs Network;
- Establish an international business network and economic development strategy
- Establish a network of incubators and business parks
- Establish a region-wide high-tech business plan competition

Tourism - Have the region become a major tourism destination and 2nd place of residence

- Develop and implement a coordinated tourism campaign for the entire region
- Determine the need for further Great Lakes port development
- Aggressively promote winter sports in the region
- Develop a region-wide recreational trail network
- Explore programs to capture and utilize the talent of seasonal and retired residents

Infrastructure - Develop a 21st century vision for broadband/cellular service, highways, rail service and air service

- Expand broadband and cell phone penetration across the region
- Develop a comprehensive highway plan for the region
- Develop a comprehensive rail service plan for the region
- Develop a long-term air service strategy for the region

Natural Resources - Continue to promote use of the region's natural resources in an environmentally sound, safe, and sustainable manner and focus on proactive strategies that promote value-added economic activity within the region.

- Establish a Northern Products cluster group
- Establish a biomass / biofuel energy consortium
- Continue to explore wind energy as an alternative energy source
- Build economic growth and job/business creation around a waste transformation cluster
- Develop a business model to support value-added manufacturing

Health Care - Provide citizens of the region with the highest quality, affordable, convenient health care services available.

- Explore the establishment of health care cooperatives
- Enhance and expand the use of telemedicine
- Explore how to retain more medical care spending that is lost to other regions
- Increase worker training to support the existing and growing health care industry

Implementation

Implementing this plan will require vision, leadership, resources, and cooperation. The implementation chapter lists and explains all of the key elements required for a timely and successful implementation of this plan. The consultants recommend that a high priority be given to the issue of the organization that will carry out the implementation of the plan. There is a degree of urgency to getting this issue settled so that the region may speak with one voice as they apply for grants, discuss policy matters with public officials, and plan for economic growth and prosperity for the region.

There are numerous recommendations in the plan and it will be impossible to undertake everything recommended in the plan immediately. Priorities must be established and a limited number of initiatives should be undertaken. Based upon the current economic conditions, the opportunities currently available, ongoing efforts by other economic development organizations, and the potential economic impact, the consultants recommend that the following initiatives be undertaken in the next 1-2 years:

- Higher education focused on growing the research base, higher education enrollments, tech transfer, and spin off opportunities from research and other activities.
- Biofuels / Biomass consortium
- Workforce training in paper and forest products, shipbuilding, digital technology, and entrepreneurship
- New Economy infrastructure – broadband; cell service; region wide communication network

New Economy Infrastructure: U.P. Link and WiMax

Kim Stoker of the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) and Carlton Crothers of the Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation (MTEC) SmartZone have offered an initiative called U.P. Link, a digital telecommunications network spanning the entire region, which would facilitate implementation of the above strategies. In addition, Northern Michigan University is involved in testing a broadband wireless technology called WiMax which may offer a solution to broadband access. These ideas merit serious consideration, and ought to be viewed as top tier priorities in implementing the strategic plan.

Longer Range Implementation Goals

Longer term implementation goals - years 3-4 - should include the following:

- Tourism and seasonal residents
- Infrastructure – highways and airports
- Forest products cluster
- International economic development with a focus on ship building, mining, and manufacturing.

