



# Engaging Employers, Incumbent Workers and Jobseekers:

## Final Report for the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network Expansion (SWMERN-E) Project

July 26, 2019



**Prepared for:**

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research  
Employment Management Services Division  
300 S. Westnedge Avenue  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007  
IF-26347-14-60-A-26  
CFDA #17.283

**Prepared by:**

Deanna Khemani  
Melissa Mack  
Leela Hebbar  
Marian Negoita  
Eduardo Ortiz



# Contents

---

|                                                                                       |              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements.....</b>                                                          | <b>i</b>     |
| <b>Executive Summary.....</b>                                                         | <b>ES-1</b>  |
| SWMERN-E Program Model and Key Expansion Features.....                                | ES-1         |
| <b>I. Introduction .....</b>                                                          | <b>I-1</b>   |
| Summary of the Problem Being Addressed by the SWMERN-E Initiative .....               | I-2          |
| What is an ERN? .....                                                                 | I-3          |
| The Story of the Southwest Michigan ERN .....                                         | I-4          |
| County and Employment Context .....                                                   | I-4          |
| The SWMERN-E Initiative .....                                                         | I-6          |
| Evaluation Design .....                                                               | I-10         |
| Overview of the Report .....                                                          | I-11         |
| <b>II. SWMERN-E Operating Structure and Partnerships.....</b>                         | <b>II-1</b>  |
| Upjohn and Program Leadership .....                                                   | II-2         |
| West Michigan TEAM .....                                                              | II-5         |
| Michigan Works! Southwest .....                                                       | II-5         |
| Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.....                                 | II-6         |
| SWMERN-E Educational Training Providers.....                                          | II-6         |
| Local Financial Institutions .....                                                    | II-7         |
| Other SWMERN-E Partnerships .....                                                     | II-7         |
| SWMERN-E Operations and Governance.....                                               | II-8         |
| Challenges in SWMERN-E Administration and Project Management.....                     | II-10        |
| <b>III. Building a Foundation for Collaboration the Public Workforce System .....</b> | <b>III-1</b> |
| The Business Engagement Climate Prior to WIF .....                                    | III-2        |
| Role of Public Workforce System in Business Service Design and Delivery .....         | III-2        |
| Integration of Public Workforce System BST Staff and SWMERN-E Success Coaches .....   | III-6        |
| Challenges Incorporating the Public Workforce System into the ERN Model .....         | III-11       |

|                                                                                              |               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>IV. Expansion of ERN Model in Southwest Michigan .....</b>                                | <b>IV-1</b>   |
| SWMERN-E Outreach and Recruitment .....                                                      | IV-2          |
| SWMERN-E Member Enrollment .....                                                             | IV-6          |
| Challenges Recruiting New Businesses Under the Expansion .....                               | IV-13         |
| <b>V. Efforts to Engage SWMERN-E Members in Developing Career Pathways .....</b>             | <b>V-1</b>    |
| A Case for Career Pathway Development Within Firms .....                                     | V-2           |
| SWMERN-E Efforts to Build Entry-Level Pathways for Specific Occupations and Industries ..... | V-2           |
| SWMERN-E Efforts to Assist Members in Building Internal Career Pathways .....                | V-3           |
| Challenges .....                                                                             | V-7           |
| <b>VI. Incumbent Worker Services.....</b>                                                    | <b>VI-1</b>   |
| Success Coaching Operations, Communications, and Services .....                              | VI-2          |
| Incumbent Worker Training Services .....                                                     | VI-9          |
| Reasons Cited for Undertaking Short-Term Classroom Training and OJT .....                    | VI-12         |
| Challenges and Successes in Serving Incumbent Workers .....                                  | VI-14         |
| <b>VII. Jobseeker Services .....</b>                                                         | <b>VII-1</b>  |
| Using Success Coaches to Recruit and Place Jobseekers with SWMERN-E Members .....            | VII-2         |
| Short-Term Training for Jobseekers .....                                                     | VII-2         |
| Participant Perspectives on Training .....                                                   | VII-4         |
| Challenges and Successes with Jobseeker Services .....                                       | VII-8         |
| <b>VIII. SWMERN-E Program Costs.....</b>                                                     | <b>VIII-1</b> |
| Approach to the Cost Study .....                                                             | VIII-1        |
| SWMERN-E Program Costs.....                                                                  | VIII-3        |
| <b>IX. Outcomes .....</b>                                                                    | <b>IX-1</b>   |
| System-Level Outcomes .....                                                                  | IX-2          |
| Employer-Level Outcomes .....                                                                | IX-3          |
| Participant Outcomes and Perceived Benefits .....                                            | IX-10         |
| Summary .....                                                                                | IX-19         |

|                                                                                                                                             |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>X. Conclusion .....</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>X-1</b> |
| Summary of Grant Goals and Achievements .....                                                                                               | X-1        |
| Implementation Successes and Promising Practices .....                                                                                      | X-2        |
| Implementation Challenges .....                                                                                                             | X-4        |
| Sustainability and Replicability of the ERN Model .....                                                                                     | X-5        |
| Implications for Workforce Policy and Future Research .....                                                                                 | X-6        |
| <b>Appendix A: Survey Methodology .....</b>                                                                                                 | <b>A-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix B: SWMERN-E Survey Instruments .....</b>                                                                                        | <b>B-5</b> |
| Employer Baseline Survey .....                                                                                                              | B-6        |
| Employer Follow-Up Survey .....                                                                                                             | B-9        |
| Incumbent Worker Short-term Classroom Training and OJT Baseline Survey .....                                                                | B-14       |
| Incumbent Worker Success Coach Baseline Survey .....                                                                                        | B-23       |
| Jobseeker Training Baseline Survey .....                                                                                                    | B-28       |
| <b>Appendix C: Examples of Organizations Offering Industry-Specific Information<br/>    Sessions and Partner Engagement Activities.....</b> | <b>C-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix D: Community and Faith-Based Organizations Hosting Information<br/>    Sessions and Partner Engagement Meetings .....</b>       | <b>D-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix E: SWMERN-E Members by Date Joined, New or Existing, and County<br/>    .....</b>                                               | <b>E-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix F: SWMERN-E Members by Size and Industry.....</b>                                                                               | <b>F-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix G: Final SWMERN-E Performance Outcomes .....</b>                                                                                | <b>G-1</b> |
| <b>Appendix H: Supplemental Outcomes Analysis .....</b>                                                                                     | <b>H-1</b> |
| <b>References.....</b>                                                                                                                      | <b>R-1</b> |

# Acknowledgements

---

The authors of this report would like to thank the staff of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research and West Michigan TEAM—in particular, Dallas Oberlee, Kathy Olsen, Jill Gernaat, James Vander Hulst, and Duane Peterson—for all their help in managing and overseeing both the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network Expansion (SWMERN-E) initiative and this evaluation, and for sharing information about the original ERN model. The authors would also like to thank the SWMERN-E success coaches, Kelli Adams, Sarah Beckle, April Hall, Peter Sanchez, and Karen Sheerin, for their insights into employer engagement and coaching services, as well as SWMERN-E members and incumbent workers who participated in focus groups. Finally, the authors thank the Michigan Works! Southwest Business Services Team representatives, especially Kara Stewart, the coordinator, who provided valuable insights into coordination activities with grant-funded staff and success coaches. Without the contributions of these individuals and organizations, this report would not have been possible.

At SPR, the authors are also grateful to Hannah Betesh for her thoughtful and extensive review of this report; Caleb van Docto and Mika Clark for their insights concerning initial rounds of site visits; Karen Jarsky for her expert editing; Robert Corning and Ann Kingsbury for their contract management expertise; and Eduardo Ortiz for his data management, project support, and report production skills. All these individuals, and others, were instrumental in helping to bring this report and the evaluation to conclusion.



This report was funded with federal funds under a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the policies of the U.S. Department of Labor; likewise, mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations does not imply any endorsement of same by the U.S. government.

This product is copyrighted by Social Policy Research Associates. Internal use by an organization and/or personal use by an individual for non-commercial purposes is permissible. All other uses require the prior authorization of the copyright owner. This report was funded by the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Employment Management Services Division, under Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant IF-26347-14-60-A-26, CFDA #17283 from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. As previously stated, this report does not necessarily reflect the official position of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research or the U.S. Department of Labor.



*Engaging Employers, Incumbent Workers and Jobseekers: Final Report for the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network Expansion (SWMERN-E) Project*, by Deanna Khemani, Melissa Mack, Leela Hebbar, and Marian Negoita, Social Policy Research Associates, is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

# Executive Summary

---

This report summarizes findings on the implementation, outcomes, and costs of the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network Expansion (SWMERN-E) project, operated from 2014 to 2019 by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Upjohn) using a \$3 million Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Employer Resource Networks® (ERNs) are private–public consortia whose goal is reduced absenteeism and improved workforce retention through employee support.<sup>1</sup> Many communities operating ERNs use them as a regional social and talent-development network strategy. ERNs create local networks of employers, public agencies, and local service providers that support employer members and their workforce through retention services. Although the primary vehicles of support are success coaching and supportive services provided to members’ entry-level workers to help them maintain and thrive in their employment, the success coaches and support services are available to *all* member employees who need them. Dedicated onsite success coaches work collaboratively with human resource staff and community partners to address workplace stability and mitigate barriers that may be impeding individuals’ ability to retain employment.

As part of the WIF grant, Upjohn awarded Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) a contract to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the SWMERN-E program—consisting of an implementation study, an outcomes study, and a cost allocation study—to inform future programming for businesses, incumbent workers, and jobseekers. Early implementation findings were shared with Upjohn’s WIF program manager in annual progress reports, and SPR also prepared a detailed implementation guide for local areas interested in starting their own ERNs.<sup>2</sup> The final report discusses the expansion’s implementation and outcomes, details the costs of implementing the expanded service design, and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

## SWMERN-E Program Model and Key Expansion Features

The SWMERN® was first established in early 2012 for two Michigan counties—Kalamazoo and Calhoun—and included 10 employer members. Administrative support for the early ERN model in Southwest Michigan was provided by a partner agency, West Michigan TEAM, which supported ERNs elsewhere in Michigan and around the country. Under the WIF-funded expansion, Upjohn provided administrative and programmatic oversight and guidance to all its subcontractors and service providers and managed key relationships with key system partners, including West Michigan TEAM, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and Michigan Works! Southwest (MWSW) Business Services Team (BST) professionals. Upjohn also partnered with other public agencies in the economic development, workforce development, and education fields to pursue system-level

---

<sup>1</sup> ERN and SWMERN are both registered trademarks of ERN-USA, formerly West Michigan TEAM. To indicate this, the registered trademark symbol ® is applied to the first mentioned of each in the report’s Executive Summary and Introduction. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the ERN administrator in Southwest Michigan as West Michigan TEAM, since that is what was stated in the WIF contracts.

<sup>2</sup> Khemani, D. and Mack, M. (2018). *Expanding employer engagement: A guide to developing and sustaining an Employer Resource Network*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates (Retrieved from <https://www.spra.com/wordpress2/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ERN-Implementation-Guide-Final.pdf>).

changes through the SWMERN-E, often leveraging existing relationships and programs for outreach and recruitment, training, and supportive services for incumbent workers and jobseekers.

The WIF-funded expansion aimed to build on the existing SWMERN and included the following efforts: involving the public workforce system into the design and delivery of services; expanding the reach of the employer network into two new counties—Branch and St. Joseph—and increasing total membership by 25 new employers; providing incumbent worker services to include success coaching and leadership, supervisory, and occupational skills; and recruiting and training eligible jobseekers to fill available job career pathways for retention and succession planning. Following is a summary of SWMERN-E program services and achievements by each expansion component.

## **Public Workforce System Engagement**

Building strong collaborative relationships between SWMERN-E members, West Michigan TEAM, and, as a key partner, the public workforce system was an important component of the expansion envisioned under the WIF grant. Given employers' needs for skilled labor and the public workforce system's emphasis on serving both jobseekers *and* employers, Upjohn sought to bring the SWMERN-E and the local public workforce system together through its One-Stop service delivery system, called Michigan Works! Southwest (MWSW) service centers, to better serve the business community. Upjohn staff members successfully integrated their public workforce system with the SWMERN-E model. Key findings include the following:

- **The WIF grant facilitated the establishment of a coordinated service delivery approach for business engagement activities.** Most ERNs throughout the United States remain separate from their local public workforce system in order to maintain independence and ensure businesses' needs are prioritized. Under the WIF grant, SWMERN-E success coaches developed a much closer working relationship with BST professionals in MWSW service centers. They worked together to coordinate outreach and recruitment activities, leading to a significant increase in the number of local businesses joining the SWMERN-E during the grant's period of performance. To a lesser extent, the public workforce system was also able to work in a coordinated fashion, filling SWMERN-E members' job vacancies and helping to facilitate training for their incumbent workers.
- **The focus of BST staff and success coaches in their employer outreach became less transactional and more relational over time.** Success coaches and BST professionals reported that they focused their efforts on developing strong, lasting relationships with businesses, rather than simply meeting a single need. One of the promising findings from this evaluation is that SWMERN-E members worked closely with Michigan Works! to provide training for in-demand occupations needed by their firms, and this closer relationship led to increased satisfaction on the part of its business members. Employers who participated in focus groups said that the WIF funding helped them maintain a competitive advantage by providing much-needed managerial and supervisory training to their employees.
- **Success coaches and BST staff developed an understanding of individual business needs and provided services to meet those specific needs.** Having a seat at the table during SWMERN-E meetings provided public workforce system professionals with an

opportunity to listen in on very candid discussions about employers' individual and collective needs, some of which went beyond their workforce. This created opportunities for success coaches and BST professionals to look for innovative ways to address employers' specific challenges and to build the capacity of the public workforce system to innovate.

### **Geographic Expansion Under SWMERN-E**

The SWMERN-E project had two expansion goals for the WIF grant: (1) increase the total number of employer members in the network, and (2) expand the ERN service delivery model to employers in new geographic areas in the Southwest Michigan Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA). Key findings include the following:

- **There was an increase in the total number of new employer members added to the SWMERN during the grant period, as well as expansion in sectoral diversity.** The grant exceeded its membership goal. In doing so, staff recruited businesses from new sectors, including healthcare and social assistance and hospitality.
- **In the face of challenges working with the two new counties, grant-funded staff were able to adjust their approach.** West Michigan TEAM staff, along with grant-funded Upjohn staff, increased their efforts to meet collectively and individually with employers in rural Branch and St. Joseph Counties. They sought to actively listen to concerns and encourage participation by allowing employers to meet personally with success coaches. West Michigan TEAM even worked with Upjohn to hire a success coach who resided in Branch County to improve outreach and communication with local employers. In 2017 and 2018, West Michigan TEAM and the lead success coach—a staff member who coordinated communication and services across all the success coaches—increased their outreach efforts in Branch County, attending over 30 informational events.
- **The expansion enabled the SWMERN-E to successfully experiment with new approaches to engaging employers.** A reduced membership fee for the first year helped to increase the number of employers joining the SWMERN-E during the grant period and provided success coaches time to demonstrate proof of concept to employers. Additionally, utilizing MWSW BST professionals from the One-Stop delivery system for increasing information sharing about the model with local businesses was effective. MWSW BST professionals conducted weekly meetings and roundtables with employers in the four-county area targeted by the WIF grant, which enabled direct access for information sharing with employers.
- **Success coaches saw a rise in employer referrals from economic development and community partner staff, which spurred interest in SWMERN-E membership in the business community.** The WIF program manager and resource navigator were active in conducting information sessions with economic development and community-based organizations that work closely within the local area to serve employers of all sizes.

## Career Pathways Development

Engaging with member firms in building career pathways was a goal of the expansion envisioned under the WIF grant. According to the grant agreement, Upjohn expected West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches to work with employer members to create formal career pathway structures across companies representing the different industries in the SWMERN-E, mainly advanced manufacturing and healthcare. However, it was one of the last endeavors undertaken by the administrative team because they were primarily focused on expanding the ERN model into two new counties and increasing the number of members in the network. Key findings include the following:

- **Despite efforts to educate employers on the benefits of creating career pathways, most employers did not undertake this work during the grant period.** The administrative team used SWMERN-E member meetings to provide general information about career pathways and held in-depth training sessions for members interested in building career pathways for their respective companies. These events provided the grant's administrative team with opportunities to build a common language around career pathways and a knowledge base that employers could then use to pursue related discussions with their success coaches. While the seed was planted, not many SWMERN-E members were ready to undertake this endeavor during the grant's period of performance, primarily for reasons related to time and staffing investments.
- **Employers must invest significant time and resources to develop career pathways within their organizations.** Most SWMERN-E firms had multiple career pathways that could be developed, but identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential for success on the job is time consuming. It was therefore important to build in key metrics to assess the impact career pathways had on employee retention and job satisfaction in order to help employers evaluate the benefits of investing in their development. Work with SWMERN-E members to identify these key metrics had not yet been initiated at the close of the grant period.
- **SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff reported improved understanding of and capacity for advocating for the career pathway approach.** Both used the professional development they received to work one-on-one with jobseekers and incumbent workers in developing career pathway plans.
- **Career pathway development was mainly initiated at the employee level, rather than at the firm level.** At the employee level, success coaches and MWSW BST staff helped employees focus on career planning by looking at advancement opportunities within SWMERN-E member firms. At the firm level, only a few employers mapped out career pathways available within their own organizations that could be used to support human capital development efforts, such as on-the-job training (OJT) and pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs leading to career growth.

## Incumbent Worker Services

Throughout the grant period, employees of SWMERN-E member companies had access to a variety of services. As under the original SWMERN, a core service available to member businesses was

onsite success coaches who assisted employees struggling with personal issues to address problems that may have affected their job performance. Under the WIF grant, incumbent worker services expanded to include more emphasis on career coaching and support for career advancement through short-term occupational skills training, both classroom-based and OJT. In addition, the grant funded several professional development activities designed to build the capacity of success coaches to provide effective and advancement-oriented services to employees of member companies. Key findings include the following:

- **Providing professional development to success coaches and creating new specialized assignments among them yielded a stronger, more effective success coach team to serve incumbent workers.** The success coach team grew from two to five staff members over the project period. A lead success coach was appointed to supervise and coordinate them, and a resource navigator was appointed to focus on helping the whole team access more community resources. In addition, coaches attended several professional development trainings designed to expand and deepen their coaching skills.
- **Success coaches maintained high levels of communication with employer members and, in some cases, helped influence company policies.** Both parties agreed that strong communication was key to employees' successful utilization of services at their sites. Success coaches also advocated for employers to increase wage rates, develop internal career pathways, and in general become more "employee-centered" in their company cultures. In some cases, these efforts resulted in changes such as wage increases.
- **New incumbent worker training services under the grant were highly valued by SWMERN-E members.** The WIF grant funded classroom-based, short-term training in leadership, supervisory, and occupational skills, as well as career-pathway-focused OJT. These OJT opportunities helped incumbent workers increase their skill level and/or specialization, which led to pay increases and promotions for many. SWMERN-E employer members valued the opportunity to work with the WIF-funded training coordinator, brought onto the team during the latter half of the grant, who specialized in guiding them through the training and OJT contracts as well as the reimbursement process. Without this dedicated position, it is unlikely that so many employers would have taken up incumbent worker training during the grant period. While the administrative team members were proud of how many people they trained, they felt they could have trained more.

## **Jobseeker Services**

The vision underlying the WIF grant was to meet the demand for workers among SWMERN-E members by filling open positions with jobseekers who had successfully completed short-term soft skills and occupational skills training. To do this, SWMERN-E businesses were to share lists of their job openings with project staff who would then coordinate with local MWSW service centers and other community partners to recruit jobseekers for open positions. The intent was to identify available jobseekers who had the skills needed by SWMERN-E employers, and then refer those jobseekers to member businesses with job openings to screen for suitability. If a job applicant needed skills remediation, it was anticipated that the member employer would work with a success coach to help the individual enroll in a SWMERN-E-supported training program. For a variety of reasons, however, members were inconsistent in providing job postings to success coaches, and the

SWMERN-E administrators and employer members both ultimately turned the focus of jobseeker services to supporting jobseeker training in programs requested by employers. Over the course of the grant period, there was a shift from that approach of placing individual jobseekers into vacant positions with SWMERN-E member companies to providing cohort-based training to jobseekers, only some of whom were eventually placed at SMWERN-E member companies. Key findings include the following:

- **Initial attempts to use the network, especially success coaches, to facilitate placement of jobseekers with SWMERN-E member companies were less effective than envisioned.** Employers saw the benefit of membership in the SWMERN-E primarily as access to success coaching services for incumbent workers, rather than as a new avenue for filling open positions.
- **Sponsoring relevant occupational skills training for jobseekers proved to be a successful strategy for helping SWMERN-E members fill open positions.** The SWMERN-E ultimately aimed to strengthen the pipeline of qualified candidates through support of occupational skills training for jobseekers. Over the course of the grant, close to 150 jobseekers undertook training in five different types of training programs for occupations in which SWMERN-E members had openings.
- **Jobseekers who completed training and responded to a jobseeker survey described numerous barriers to obtaining employment, but they were committed to using training to secure their existing jobs and/or advance into more satisfying, higher-skilled, higher-paying work.** They indicated a wide array of reasons for participating in training, and they anticipated benefits of doing so. All these benefits centered on improving their chances for stable, satisfying employment and advancement.

## **Program Costs**

The evaluation included a study of the costs incurred to manage the program and provide services to all participants (incumbent workers and jobseekers), as well as resources leveraged by Upjohn to supplement the WIF grant. Key findings include the following:

- **A key cost of WIF grant was staff labor (both salaries and fringe benefits) for success coaches and for Upjohn employees with programmatic responsibilities, including overseeing program implementation, tracking performance measures, managing contracts, and managing WIF grant finances.** Low-skilled workers require substantial support to stay employed and engaged in educational and vocational training. This means that programs like SWMERN-E need both a sufficiently large staff and sufficiently experienced staff members to provide appropriate support. Therefore, salaries and fringe benefits—which allowed Upjohn to provide these services—accounted for almost half of total costs.
- **A notable aspect of SWMERN-E was the large amount of leveraged resources compared to the amount of grant costs.** Leveraged resources (including grants, donations and in-kind contributions) represent more than one-third of overall costs and almost half of the actual WIF spending.

- **Over half of the program's total expenditures were on outside services or subcontracts.** More than 80 percent of this amount was used to pay for classroom-based training and OJT reimbursement (up to 50 percent of an employee's wages for six weeks of training).
- **Upjohn spent \$2,320,657 of the WIF grant on the operation of the SWMERN-E program, yielding a cost per participant of \$856.** The figure reported here is different from the total WIF award amount (\$3 million) for three reasons: (1) it is expressed in constant 2015 dollars, (2) it does not include payments to SPR for evaluation, and (3) the grant utilization rate may have been less than 100 percent. When leveraged resources are factored in, the total spent is \$3,277,316, yielding a cost per participant of \$1,259.

## Grant Outcomes

Using surveys, the study team analyzed the outcomes of the SWMERN-E on employers, incumbent workers, and jobseekers. Findings on outcomes include the following:

- **There was an increase in the total number of new employer members added to the SWMERN-E during the grant period, as well as an expansion in sectoral diversity.** The expansion, however, was only achieved in one county, St. Joseph, as no new members from Branch County were added during the grant period. With 29 new members, the grant exceeded its goal of adding 25 members.
- **Employers had positive attitudes toward the ERN model.** The majority, including both existing and new members, were either very satisfied or satisfied with the SWMERN-E, and planned to continue participating.
- **The participant survey data suggest that the SWMERN-E initiative met its goal of training jobseekers for positions at ERN companies.** Nearly four in 10 jobseekers reported they had been hired or were in the process of being hired by the employer sponsoring the training.
- **Most participants reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the training they received.** Similarly, three-quarters reported that the advice they received from a success coach helped them a lot. These results were consistently high over time, suggesting that the initiative maintained high quality services during the grant period.

## Implications for Future Policy and Research

The findings in this report contribute to the growing knowledge base on interventions for low-skilled, entry-level workers. They may prove valuable in discussions around how best to design follow-up services authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to support individuals who have been placed into employment but still require additional coaching and wraparound services to remain employed and advance in their careers. Under WIOA there is also greater emphasis within the public workforce system on engaging employers and helping them build the skills and competencies of their existing workforce in order to remain competitive. Business-led state and local workforce boards offer training services to help companies accomplish this goal. Although limited, workforce boards can reimburse employers for the costs of training new frontline employees through customized training, OJT, and apprenticeship programs. As such, many of the

SWMERN-E training interventions are allowable expenses under WIOA. Thus, those designing and operating WIOA services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth may have an interest in the ERN model and how the SWMERN-E connected employers and their workers to needed federal, state, and local resources as well as where the efforts fell short.

This report also points to the need for some additional research. While there is a wide body of research on effective service strategies and approaches for serving low-income and barriered populations,<sup>3</sup> there is relatively little research on the effectiveness of using the ERN model specifically as a retention strategy for employers. A goal of the SWMERN-E evaluation was to assess the outcomes of the ERN model with respect to reducing absenteeism and employee turnover at member firms. This study team worked to collect comprehensive feedback on absenteeism and turnover rates for incumbent workers; assessing change over time proved infeasible, however, due to low survey response rates, challenges administering the employer survey, and unavailability of employee data from firms. The study team's experience suggests that, to better understand how success coaching affects recipient and business outcomes over time, future research on the ERN model is warranted. This will (1) provide a better understanding of the extent to which success coaches across ERNs are actually coaching participants versus providing transactional interventions, and (2) ensure the use of methods and designs that allow for the effective measurement of all relevant impacts.

Overall, SWMERN-E implementation was successful, as indicated by the fact that employers, incumbent workers, and jobseekers were satisfied with the services they received. The expanded model provided resources that employers could use to upskill their workforce—specifically, it provided soft skills and occupational skills training and onboarded OJT to assist new employees to be successful in their new positions. Employers also saw value in networking with one another and working collectively across firms to identify retention challenges in the local community. In sum, while additional research would help to clarify key issues, the SWMERN-E model has real potential for addressing issues affecting employee turnover and absenteeism.

---

<sup>3</sup> Timmeney, B., & Hollenbeck, K. (2017). *Employer Resource Networks: What works in forming a successful ERN?* Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Retrieved from <https://research.upjohn.org/reports/191>); Hollenbeck, K., Erickcek, G., & Timmeney, B. (2011). *An assessment of the BC CAREERS Employer Resource Network: Its contributions to the ERN model*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Retrieved from <http://research.upjohn.org/reports/182>); Derr, M., & Holcomb, P. (2010). *Employer Resource Networks: Uniting businesses and public partners to improve job retention and advancement for low-wage workers*. Oakland, CA and Washington, DC: Social Policy Research Associates and Mathematica Policy Research (Retrieved from <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/employer-resource-networks-uniting-businesses-and-public-partners-to-improve-job-retention-and-advancement-for-low-wage-workers>).

# I. Introduction

---

The U.S. economy is currently experiencing high demand for labor: The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the economy will grow by 11.5 million jobs over the 2016–2026 decade.<sup>4</sup> A potential pool of workers for this large number of available jobs are those individuals who historically have had difficulty retaining employment due to personal circumstances, which primarily are low-skilled and low-wage workers. Once hired, these individuals often face workplace stability problems stemming from circumstances such as lack of reliable transportation, childcare, and housing, which can translate into absenteeism and retention challenges. With these concerns in mind, in 2014 the U.S. Department of Labor (US DOL) awarded the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Upjohn) a \$3 million Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant to implement an expansion of a local Employer Resource Network® (ERN). The ERN model provides member businesses with dedicated onsite career coaches who work collaboratively with human resource (HR) staff and community partners to address workplace stability issues and mitigate barriers that may be affecting an individual's ability to retain employment.

The Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network Expansion (SWMERN-E) project aimed to build upon the existing ERN model in Southwest Michigan in five key areas. These areas included expanding the geographic scope of the model in Southwest Michigan to include members from Branch and St. Joseph Counties and increasing the number of new member businesses by 25 across the four-county Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA). The expansion also sought to include additional interventions for member firms beyond the existing success coaching services by providing incumbent worker training programs to assist in upskilling members' workforce and offering jobseekers access to occupational skills to fill member firms' available job openings. Finally, the expansion sought to better integrate the ERN model with the services offered by the public workforce system and to work alongside member firms to build career pathways. For the evaluation requirement of the grant, Upjohn, in turn, awarded Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) a contract to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the SWMERN-E program, consisting of an implementation study, outcomes study, and cost study. This final report for the evaluation presents and discusses the findings from each study component, provides recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, and suggests areas for future research.

---

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017, October 24). *Employment projections: 2016–26* (News Release USDL-17-1429). Retrieved from [bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecopro.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecopro.pdf)

## Summary of the Problem Being Addressed by the SWMERN-E Initiative

The challenges that many low-wage, low-skilled workers face in making ends meet and retaining employment affect their ability to advance into better jobs; these challenges are well-documented.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the Great Recession, for example, lower-skilled workers lost a higher percentage of jobs than higher-skilled workers did, and employment for those with less than a high school education fell by more than 10 percent.<sup>6</sup> Even in a time of economic recovery, retention of low-skilled workers remains a challenge for many employers.<sup>7</sup> ERNs can assist employers in addressing some of the challenges faced by their workforce by reducing absenteeism and increasing employee retention with dedicated “success coaches” who work individually with workers to address personal challenges affecting their work performance.

Of the extensive research on low-skill jobseekers and low-wage workers, the most substantial body of evidence focuses on recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The TANF program provides temporary financial assistance for children and families with one or more dependent children, as well as pregnant women. This assistance helps recipients pay for food, shelter, utilities, and non-medical expenses. Research on public assistance recipients and other low-skill jobseekers has suggested that, although many are successful in finding employment, job loss is common.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, former public assistance recipients very commonly have long spells of unemployment between jobs, with many who lose a job needing at least a year to find work.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: Bragg, D., Dresser, L., & Smith, W. (2012). Leveraging workforce development and postsecondary education for low-skilled, low-income workers: Lessons from the shifting gears initiative. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 157, 53–66; Kenworthy, L., & Marx, I. (2018). In-work poverty in the United States. In H. Lohmann & I. Marx (Eds.), *Handbook on in-work poverty* (pp. 328–346). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar; Maxwell, N. L., & Rotz, D. (2017). Potential assistance for disadvantaged workers: Employment social enterprises. *Journal of Labor Research*, 38, 145–168; Osterman, P. (2017). In search of the high road: Meaning and evidence. *ILR Review*, 71, 3–34; Redcross, C., Barden, B., Bloom, D., Tso, A., Fink, B., Worth, F., & Farrell, M. (2016). *The enhanced transitional jobs demonstration*. U.S. Department of Labor.

<sup>6</sup> Martinson, K. (2010). *Partnering with employers to promote job advancement for low-skill individuals*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

<sup>7</sup> Mahan, T., Nelms, D., Bearden, C. R., & Pearce, B. (2019). *2019 retention report: Trends, reasons, and a call to action*. Franklin, TN: Work Institute. Retrieved from <http://info.workinstitute.com/retentionreport2019>.

<sup>8</sup> Strawn, J., & Martinson, K. (2000). *Steady work and better jobs: How to help low-income parents sustain employment and advance in the workforce*. New York, NY: MDRC.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example: Bragg, D., Dresser, L., & Smith, W. (2012). Leveraging workforce development and postsecondary education for low-skilled, low-income workers: Lessons from the shifting gears initiative. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 157, 53–66; Kenworthy, L., & Marx, I. (2018). In-work poverty in the United States. In H. Lohmann & I. Marx (Eds.), *Handbook on in-work poverty* (pp. 328–346). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar; Maxwell, N. L., & Rotz, D. (2017). Potential assistance for disadvantaged workers: Employment social enterprises. *Journal of Labor Research*, 38, 145–168; Osterman, P. (2017). In search of the high road: Meaning and evidence. *ILR Review*, 71, 3–34; Redcross, C., Barden, B., Bloom, D., Tso, A., Fink, B., Worth, F., & Farrell, M. (2016). *The enhanced transitional jobs demonstration*. U.S. Department of Labor.

Public assistance recipients were envisioned as the primary beneficiaries of the coaching services at the core of the original ERN model. While the model has expanded over time to serve a broader range of employees—mainly low-skilled, entry-level workers in the manufacturing and healthcare sectors—the early research on ERNs is useful in understanding the intent of the original model.<sup>10</sup> The ERN model aims to remedy these documented challenges with employment retention and advancement strategies delivered by dedicated success coaches assigned to provide services at members' locations.

## What is an ERN?

**Exhibit I-1: Key Partners and Components of the ERN Model**



Source: West Michigan TEAM

cross-sector collaboration among employers, community partners (such as human service

ERNs are private–public consortia whose goal is reduced absenteeism and improved workforce retention through employee support.<sup>11</sup> Many communities operating ERNs use them as a regional social and talent development network strategy. ERNs create local networks of employers, public agencies, and local service providers, and these networks support employer members and their workforce through retention services.

The primary vehicles of support are success coaching and supportive services provided to members' entry-level workers to help them maintain and thrive in their employment. Exhibit I-1 presents the key partners and components of the ERN model. Together, these participants execute a model based on (1) business engagement through an employer member governance structure; (2)

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: Timmeney, B., & Hollenbeck, K. (2012). *Employer Resource Networks: What works in forming a successful ERN?* Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn (Retrieved from <http://research.upjohn.org/reports/191>); Derr, M., & Holcomb, P. (2010). *Employer Resource Networks: Uniting businesses and public partners to improve job retention and advancement for low-wage workers*. Oakland, CA, and Washington, DC: SPR and Mathematica Policy Research (Retrieved from <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/employer-resource-networks-uniting-businesses-and-public-partners-to-improve-job-retention-and-advancement-for-low-wage-workers>); Hollenbeck, K., Erickcek, G., & Timmeney, B. (2011). *An assessment of the BC CAREERS Employer Resource Network: Its contributions to the ERN model*. Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn (Retrieved from <http://research.upjohn.org/reports/182>).

<sup>11</sup> ERN is a registered trademark of ERN-USA, formerly West Michigan TEAM. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the ERN administrator in Southwest Michigan as West Michigan TEAM, since that is the name used in the WIF contracts.

organizations), and training providers; and (3) onsite, workplace-based employee coaching and referrals to community partners for resources, including supportive services.

## **The Story of the Southwest Michigan ERN**

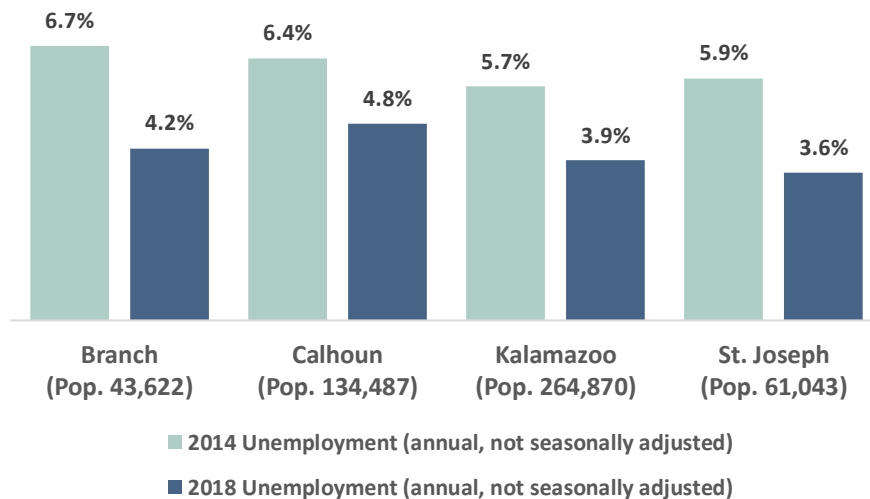
The Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network® (SWMERN) was first established in early 2012 for two Michigan counties—Kalamazoo and Calhoun—and included 10 employer members. Administrative support for the early ERN model in Southwest Michigan was provided by a partner agency, West Michigan TEAM (now known as Michigan ERN in Michigan, and ERN-USA outside the state), which is a limited liability corporation that supports ERNs in Michigan and around the country. Through the SWMERN, employer members jointly funded two success coaches who provided onsite retention services, such as coaching, access to short-term loans, and referrals to additional sources of support. In addition, members met monthly to govern the SWMERN and discuss HR challenges and strategies for addressing those challenges. SWMERN membership also connected employers to a network of strong strategic partner organizations including social services agencies (such as the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services [MDHHS]), workforce development agencies (specifically Michigan Works! Southwest), chambers of commerce, and community and technical colleges that could work collaboratively within their existing service networks to address employers' challenges and hiring needs. Through membership, SWMERN employers expected to experience lower turnover rates and hiring costs as well as improved productivity due to reductions in tardiness and absenteeism.

Employers wishing to join the SWMERN were invited by existing members and through outreach conducted primarily by West Michigan TEAM representatives. Interested employers attended a SWMERN meeting, and existing members, representing diverse industries, were asked to provide input on whether the business should be added to the network. If the employer candidate appeared to be a fit with other members' visions for employee skill building and retention services—and was willing to pay the membership dues—the company was welcomed as a member.

## **County and Employment Context**

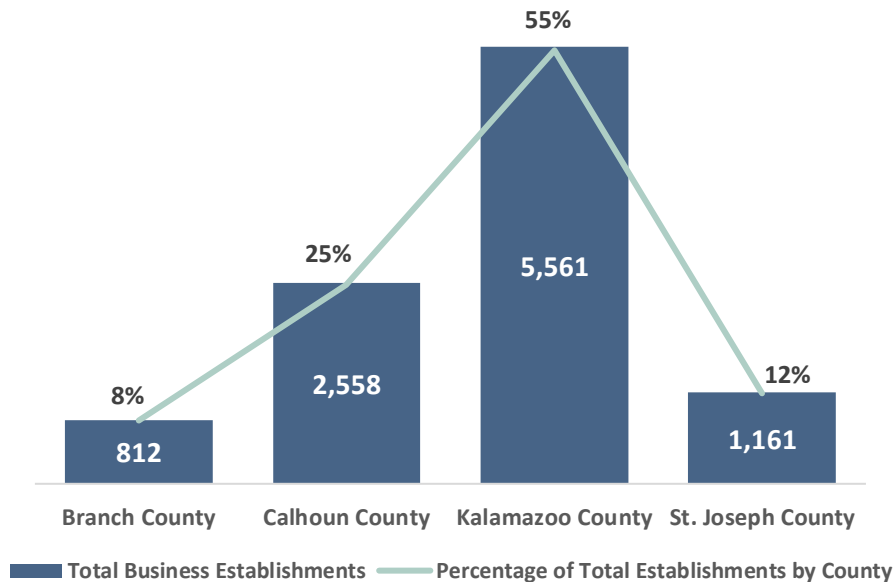
The SWMERN-E planned to serve a four-county area comprising Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties. As shown in Exhibit I-2, the total populations of the four counties varied from a low of 43,622 in Branch to a high of 264,870 in Kalamazoo. Two of the counties are mainly urban (Calhoun and Kalamazoo) and two are mainly rural (Branch and St. Joseph). Based on census data, there is also considerable variation in the total business establishments across the counties. Kalamazoo County and Calhoun County represent the largest share of total employer establishments in the service area, at 55 percent (5,561) and 25 percent (2,558), respectively; St. Joseph County represents 12 percent (1,161) of total employer establishments and Branch County represents 8 percent (812; see Exhibit I-3).

**Exhibit I-2: SWMERN-E Counties' Unemployment Rates (2014 and 2018) and Population (2018)**



Source: Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget; Census Quick Facts (accessed April 15, 2019).

**Exhibit I-3: Total Employer Establishments and Percentage of Total Business Establishments by County, 2016**



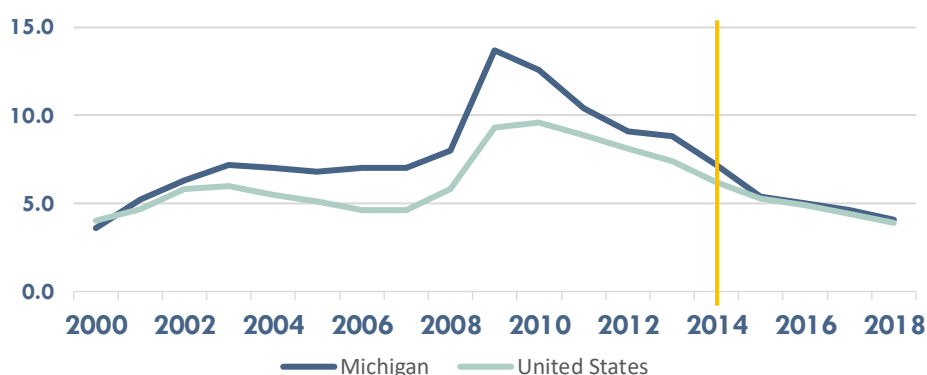
Source: Census Quick Facts (accessed April 15, 2019).

The context of the service area served by the WIF grant—population, business establishments, urban/rural, and unemployment rates—and the variations in the employment context have shaped the SWMERN-E initiative in both positive and negative ways. One goal of the initiative was to recruit

more employers from rural Branch and St. Joseph Counties to join the network. SWMERN-E success coaches had to weigh the amount of effort and time they wanted to spend in those counties, however, given that the number of business establishments was much lower than in Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties.

In the planning stages of the SWMERN-E initiative in 2014, Michigan was still recovering from the Great Recession of 2007–2009. The recession affected Michigan more harshly than the United States as a whole, and the state had not quite reached its prerecession unemployment levels. As depicted in Exhibit I-2 (above) and Exhibit I-4 (below), Michigan and the four counties included in the WIF grant experienced steady declines in unemployment rates over the WIF implementation period. By 2016 and 2017, the unemployment rates in the United States, Michigan, and Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties were at or below 5 percent, which is the mark that many economists consider “full employment.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, the unemployment levels for 2017 in the four-county service area ranged from 3.6 percent in St. Joseph County to 4.8 percent in Calhoun County; this benefited SWMERN-E success coaches, as many employers needed services to help retain their current workforce.

**Exhibit I-4: Unemployment Rates in Michigan and the United States, 2000–2018**



Note: The orange line in Exhibit I-4 represents the year the WIF-grant was awarded.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, annual average unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted).

## The SWMERN-E Initiative

With the SWMERN-E initiative, Upjohn and its partners drew upon prior research and past practices to address the challenges presented by employee absenteeism and retention in Southwest Michigan. The initiative recruited businesses from late 2015 to mid-2018 and provided services to members’ incumbent workforce until September 30, 2018. The initiative’s logic model, which shows

<sup>12</sup> Crook, C. (2018, July 6). Full employment. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from [bloomberg.com/quicktake/full-employment](https://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/full-employment); Mitchell, W., & Muysken, J. (2008). *Full employment abandoned: Shifting sands and policy failures*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

how Upjohn and its partners planned to serve employers, their employees, and jobseekers, is presented in Exhibit I-5.

The logic model in Exhibit I-5 provides an overview of the SWMERN-E initiative, including strategies and activities (namely, those innovations described earlier in the chapter), outputs, and anticipated short- and long-term outcomes. The far-left column shows the primary contexts influencing the intervention. These include the fact that SWMERN-E employers had unfilled vacancies and employees who needed support in order to successfully stay in their jobs and advance to higher-skilled, higher-paying positions. As noted, the SWMERN had 10 members spread across two counties and was supported administratively by West Michigan TEAM. It also had two success coaches who came from MDHHS. Finally, Upjohn, which is the current Michigan Works! administrator in Southwest Michigan, was the WIF grant recipient.

The second column presents the major components of the intervention—the strategies and activities that were part of the SWMERN-E geographic expansion, employer engagement and services to employers, services to jobseekers and employees, and the incorporation of the workforce system as the vehicle by which ERN services were provided. The middle column shows the planned outputs of those activities, separated into boxes specific to outputs for each of the target groups—employers, jobseekers and current employees, and the workforce system at large. For example, SWMERN-E geographic expansion, employer engagement, and services to employers led to employer outputs that included new members and hiring of new success coaches to support any new members added. Jobseekers were referred to training with an opportunity to obtain placement in employment or on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities with a member employer upon successful completion of training, while individuals already employed with member employers received retention services from success coaches and understood the career pathways available to them to advance within the company. The outputs led to the short-term outcomes. For example, jobseekers who were referred to training and OJTs should have been hired and retained in those positions. Employees should have reported improved performance, stability at work, and increased satisfaction at work with the services of the success coach.

Finally, the far-right column shows long-term outcomes, such as employers benefiting from a stable workforce and employees earning higher wages and being less likely to lose their jobs. Short-term outcomes were focused on seeing the SWMERN-E model fully established and integrated into participating employers' processes. Long-term outcomes were geared toward stable long-term employees and employers made more successful by virtue of their participation in the ERN, as well as sustainable system-level change.

The WIF-funded innovation was meant to build on the existing SWMERN, expanding its reach and services in five key areas as follows:

- **Integration of the SWMERN-E into the public workforce system.** To create a more direct link with the public workforce system, WIF expansion funds were intended to offset the cost of hiring additional success coaches who would be employed by Upjohn and the Michigan Works! Southwest agency. This was intended to create a stronger connection between SWMERN-E members, their success coaches, and the public workforce system in the community. WIF funds were also intended to be used to build stronger linkages with the public workforce system by engaging with the Michigan Works! Southwest (MWSW) Business Services Team (BST) in the local area to recruit new employers and jobseekers

for positions with SWMERN-E members and by working with its One-Stop centers to identify training opportunities for member employees or prospective employees, all with the aim of providing better support for staffing, skill building, and career pathways.<sup>13</sup>

- **Geographic expansion.** The original SWMERN encompassed Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties—both part of the local workforce area served by MWSW. The SWMERN-E was designed to add employer members in Branch and St. Joseph Counties. The goal was to actively recruit new employers in these counties and increase total membership by 25 new employers.
- **Recruitment of eligible jobseekers.** Under the old model, the difficulty that SWMERN members experienced recruiting a pipeline of skilled workers was not addressed, as the model was focused on retention strategies.<sup>14</sup> The expanded model aimed to help SWMERN-E members fill job vacancies by coordinating with the public workforce system to identify and recruit prospective employees. In addition, SWMERN-E staff attempted to build stronger linkages with the public workforce system and referrals from existing strategic partners, like community colleges, as a way to support a pipeline of skilled workers for member firms.
- **Training for jobseekers.** In addition to creating a pipeline of available talent for SWMERN-E members, WIF funds were also meant to be used to fund soft and technical skills training for job candidates recruited through the network. It was anticipated that SWMERN-E members would have preferential access to students completing the training programs. In addition to cohort-based classroom training, WIF funds could be utilized to support OJT for jobseekers.<sup>15</sup>
- **Articulated career pathways.** The SWMERN-E aimed to help educate and promote the development of career pathways within industries represented by the member companies. In the request for proposals, Upjohn required West Michigan TEAM to “work with ERN employers to create formal career ladder structures at each ERN employer.” The intent of the WIF funds was to help employers understand the need for career pathways development as an effective retention strategy and to build the capacity of the workforce system to work with employers in developing career pathways.

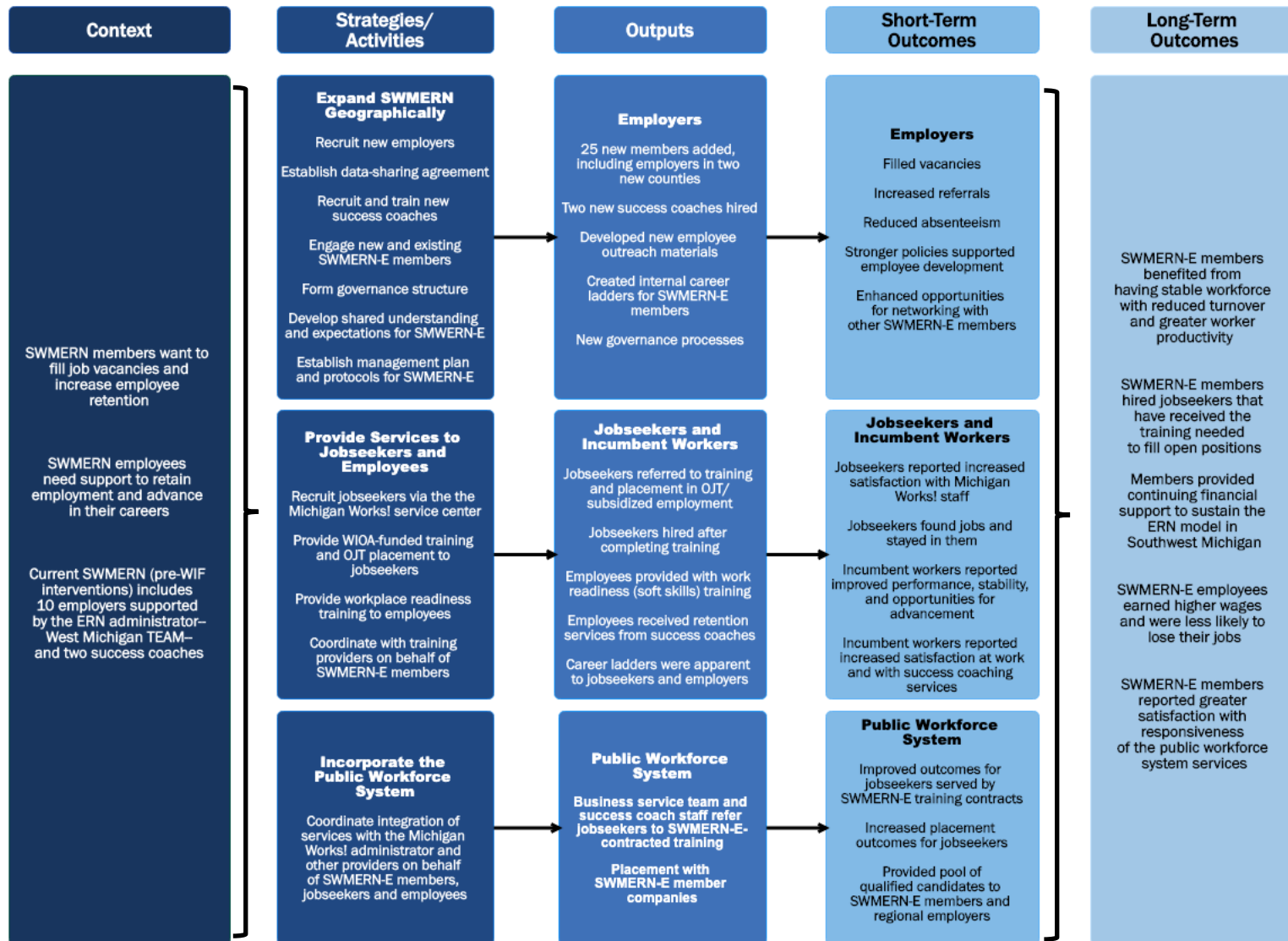
---

<sup>13</sup> In Michigan, One-Stop centers are called Michigan Works! service centers. One-Stops are designed to provide a full range of assistance to jobseekers in a single brick-and-mortar office. Established under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and reauthorized in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014, the centers offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services. Jobseekers and employers can visit a center in person or connect to the center's information online or through kiosk remote access.

<sup>14</sup> SPR conducted interviews with West Michigan TEAM and Upjohn staff in December 2015.

<sup>15</sup> The typical OJT reimbursement level is 50 percent. WIOA defines OJT as training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that: (1) provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job; (2) provides reimbursement to the employer of up to 50 percent of the wage rate of the participant for the extraordinary costs of providing training and additional supervision related to training; and (3) is limited in duration to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate. Organizations that do not have federal WIF funds to support OJT for employers may be able to utilize WIOA Title IB formula funds available from their state and local public workforce system.

Exhibit I-5: SWMERN-E Logic Model



## Evaluation Design

SPR's evaluation design included an implementation study to track implementation of the expanded model, a study of participant outcomes, and a cost study.

### Implementation Study

The implementation study sought to address the following research questions:

- How and to what extent has the SWMERN-E been able to implement the five expansion components of the model?
- What factors have influenced grant implementation?

To answer these questions, the study team collected qualitative data during four rounds of two-day site visits in winter 2015, spring 2016, fall 2017, and fall 2018. These visits included semi-structured interviews with the WIF program manager, training coordinator, MWSW BST coordinator and staff, West Michigan TEAM, success coaches, SWMERN-E members, key partners (e.g., training providers), and incumbent workers and jobseekers. Throughout this report we refer to the administrative team for the grant, which included the WIF program manager, training coordinator, lead success coach and West Michigan TEAM president.

### Outcomes Study

Working primarily with data collected from employer and employee surveys and administrative data available from West Michigan TEAM (the ERN administrator), the outcomes study sought to calculate (where possible) pre-post differences for employer, incumbent employee, and jobseeker outcomes, as well as program outcomes and measures of satisfaction with SWMERN-E services. Because of very low response rates (approximately four percent) on the follow-up surveys, however, the study team did not examine differences between baseline and follow-up outcomes for jobseekers and incumbent workers. Gift card incentives were introduced after the first year, but these incentives did not increase the survey response rates. Appendix A describes the methodology for each survey as well as the response rates in more detail.

As an alternative measure for how well the SWMERN-E initiative served participants, the study team used survey data to examine how satisfied participants were with services and whether satisfaction varied during the grant period. Participant satisfaction was examined for four service groups: (1) employers, (2) incumbent employees who received success coach services (i.e., success coach participants), (3) jobseekers who received WIF-funded training, and (4) incumbent employees who received short-term training or received OJT supported by the grant. We also examined training completion rates using survey data and Upjohn administrative records. In general, because of these low response rates on the follow-up surveys for jobseeker and incumbent worker respondent groups, the research team was not able to answer all the originally proposed outcomes research questions.

The outcomes study examined system-level outcomes using interviews and quantitative surveys. Specifically, we calculated the number of new employers brought into the SWMERN-E; assessed whether partnerships between SWMERN-E members and the public workforce system were formed

or strengthened; and examined whether key components of the WIF grant initiative showed promise of being sustained after the period of performance ended.

## Cost Study

The evaluation also included a cost allocation study. The study team designed the cost study to answer the following research questions:

- How did Upjohn and its contractors spend grant funds to support the expansion of the SWMERN?
- What resources did Upjohn leverage to supplement the WIF grant?
- How did grant expenditures and cost-per-participant calculations vary by type of training (i.e., jobseeker versus incumbent worker)?

To answer these questions, the study team collected detailed cost data from Upjohn. Data sources included quarterly reports on Upjohn's program costs and contractor agreements, which were submitted to SPR on a quarterly basis starting in June 2018; a final quarterly cost report was received on April 26, 2019. Cost data also included reports on the leveraged resources provided to US DOL by Upjohn as well as Excel spreadsheets collected from partner program staff by Upjohn. The study team then categorized reported costs and leveraged funds in order to conduct an analysis of how the WIF grant and associated leveraged funds were used to support program implementation.<sup>16</sup>

## Overview of the Report

Subsequent chapters of this report present the findings from the evaluation as follows:

- Chapter II describes the structure and partnerships of the SWMERN-E initiative.
- Chapter III addresses efforts to coordinate and collaborate with the public workforce system to provide business services to member firms.
- Chapter IV describes efforts to expand the ERN model into new counties within Southwest Michigan, including recruitment and engagement activities undertaken, employers' perceived benefits of joining the SWMERN, membership levels overall and by county, member costs, and recruitment challenges.
- Chapter V discusses the efforts undertaken to engage employers in developing career pathways.
- Chapter VI examines incumbent worker services provided, including success coaches' roles and responsibilities, success coaching services, efforts to recruit incumbent workers for services, training services, and successes and challenges serving this population.

---

<sup>16</sup> A full cost-benefit analysis was not possible because the evaluation design did not include the estimation of the impact of SWMERN-E on employers' and employees' outcomes, as it did not utilize an experimental approach (i.e., with a control or comparison group). Without a control group to measure impact, a precise calculation of benefits is not possible; therefore, a cost-benefit analysis cannot be conducted.

- Chapter VII discusses jobseeker services, including training programs funded by the WIF grant, placement services offered, and successes and challenges serving this group.
- Chapter VIII presents the analysis of program costs.
- Chapter IX provides an analysis of the outcomes of the SWMERN-E initiative.
- Chapter X concludes the report with a discussion of the findings presented in prior chapters and the implications of this research for future program and policy planning.

The report also includes several important appendices, which include:

- Appendix A: Survey Methodology.
- Appendix B: SWMERN-E Survey Instruments.
- Appendix C: Examples of Organizations Offering Industry-Specific Information Sessions and Partner Engagement Activities.
- Appendix D: Examples of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Hosting Information Sessions and Partner Engagement Meetings.
- Appendix E: SWMERN-E Members by Date Joined, New or Existing, and County.
- Appendix F: SWMERN-E Members by Size and Industry.
- Appendix G: Final SWMERN-E Performance Outcomes.
- Appendix H: Supplemental Outcomes Analysis.

Because the ERN model already existed in Southwest Michigan prior to the infusion of WIF funding, throughout this report the existing model is referred to as SWMERN, whereas activities and services funded and implemented under the WIF grant are referred to as SWMERN-E.

## II. SWMERN-E Operating Structure and Partnerships

The SWMERN-E project engaged multiple organizations and staff in both program design and program implementation. Upjohn serves as the administrative and fiscal agent for WIOA funds in Southwest Michigan. As such, it has a programmatic division that coordinates WIOA Title I and TANF employment and training programs for the local workforce development area, referred to as Michigan Works! Southwest (MWSW). MWSW staff oversaw the management of the grant and overall implementation of the SWMERN-E project. This chapter describes the relationships among these entities, the grant management responsibilities of Upjohn, and the roles of MDHHS and West Michigan TEAM, and how the partner organizations were engaged to facilitate project implementation.

### Key Findings

- **The SWMERN-E project benefited from the access that Upjohn and the ERN administrator had to existing employer engagement strategies and labor market planning resources.** Because the SWMERN-E project fell under the oversight of Upjohn and its Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB), the project administrators at Upjohn had access to several LWDB-funded resources and services. These resources included research and labor market information from Upjohn staff about business growth and changes in the four-county area and assistance from the public workforce system garnered from the MWSW BST professionals who facilitated business engagement and service delivery for the business community. The project also profited from the expertise of the West Michigan TEAM, whose personnel had extensive experience marketing the ERN model to employers throughout the country.
- **The SWMERN-E project benefited from additional financial resources that Upjohn was able to leverage to assist businesses, incumbent workers, and jobseekers in the community.** Through its MWSW service delivery arm, Upjohn was able to leverage WIOA training funds to submit Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) and supportive services for jobseekers and OJT for incumbent workers.
- **The SWMERN-E project benefited from MDHHS staff who had experience administering a wide variety of public assistance programs in the state, including food, housing, and employment and training programs.** SWMERN-E success coaches whose employer of record was MDHHS had experience with understanding public assistance requirements and benefits; they shared this expertise and knowledge with the other success coaches overseen by MWSW.
- **The SWMERN-E project strengthened private–public partnerships throughout the local workforce development area.** Strong coordination between the ERN administrator and Upjohn staff allowed grant administrators to increase participation among employers as “investors” in the local ERN model.
- **The SWMERN-E project strengthened coordination of efforts to meet the demands for skilled labor among employers.** The project focused on developing jobseeker training and incumbent worker training programs with local training providers and providing wraparound services with strategic partners. It depended on several partnerships, including those involving education and training providers, MWSW—the region’s workforce development system, and community-based providers of supportive services. Many of these partnerships—with community-based organizations at the provider level and with MDHHS at the system level—had been in place prior to SWMERN-E but grew stronger under the grant.

Exhibit II-1 provides an overview of the entities involved in SWMERN-E operations. A wide variety of actors were involved in the project, and the remainder of the chapter addresses the roles and responsibilities each played in grant implementation and service delivery under the WIF grant.

## Upjohn and Program Leadership

Upjohn provided oversight and guidance to all its subcontractors and service providers and managed key relationships with key system partners, including West Michigan TEAM, MDHHS, and MWSW BST professionals. As shown in Exhibit II-1, Upjohn staff members provided two primary types of assistance to service providers and partners: (1) programmatic support (i.e., technical assistance and capacity building related to SWMERN-E activities and services), and (2) administrative oversight (i.e., fiscal and performance monitoring). Upjohn also partnered with other public agencies in economic development, workforce development, and education fields to pursue system-level changes through the SWMERN-E, often leveraging existing relationships and programs for outreach and recruitment, training, and supportive services. Each type of assistance is described in more detail in this section.

### Administrative Oversight

Upjohn offered administrative support and oversight on the WIF grant in the form of financial oversight, reporting, and performance measurement:

- **Financial oversight activities** included monitoring the SWMERN-E budget overall and at the subcontractor level, approving subcontractors, and reimbursing subcontractors for grant-related expenses. Monitoring and approving expenditures helped Upjohn accomplish two key oversight roles: ensuring that programs used WIF funding only for costs allowable under the grant and staying abreast of the extent to which subcontractors were implementing SWMERN-E elements on schedule.
- **Reporting activities** included preparing all narrative progress reports, performance reports, and financial reports submitted to US DOL for the WIF grant. Upjohn subcontracted with West Michigan TEAM to utilize its management information system to track all success coaching services and to prepare detailed analyses of participant enrollment levels and service receipt. Training providers with whom Upjohn contracted for services tracked participant enrollment, educational outcomes, and financial expenses through their educational databases and reported fiscal and performance outcomes to Upjohn. Given that there were so many administrative datasets under the grant, Upjohn staff had to work diligently to ensure all subcontractors submitted data in a timely and reliable manner so that they could aggregate information across subcontractors for purposes of reporting to US DOL. For training providers, Upjohn required the following information at the individual participant level: number of participants enrolled and in what type of training program, number completing foundational skills, and occupational skills training and credentials achieved.
- **Performance measurement activities** included reporting performance metrics to Upjohn leadership and the LWDB. The ERN administrator and WIF program manager also aggregated data on a monthly basis so they could report out to SWMERN-E members at monthly network meetings about grant outcomes. Upjohn also worked with SPR, the third-party evaluator, on

qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts for the evaluation. Upjohn assisted SPR in setting up four rounds of site visits during which the study team conducted structured interviews with individuals from West Michigan TEAM, success coaches, training providers, SWMERN-E members, and participants.

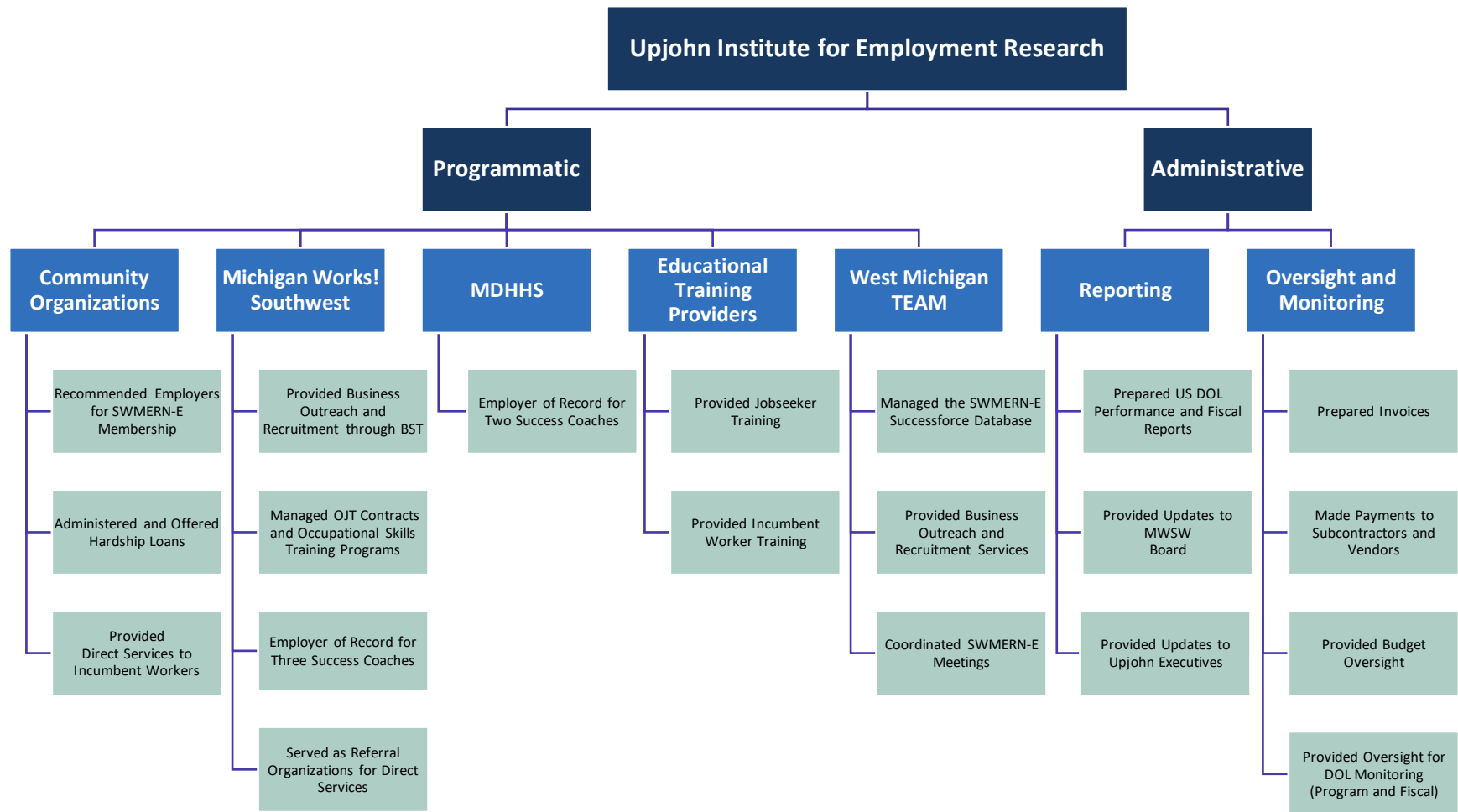
### ***Programmatic Support***

Upjohn offered programmatic support on the WIF grant in the form of day-to-day administration and coordination of grant-funded staff and coordination with training vendors and community partners. The two primary SWMERN-E staff members at Upjohn were the WIF program manager (who worked part time on the SWMERN-E initiative) and the MWSW training coordinator (who worked approximately 40 percent of her time on the SWEMRN-E initiative).

- **The WIF program manager** provided overall oversight and management of the project; recruited, hired, and oversaw training for new success coaches; provided ongoing professional development to success coaches; and coordinated partner meetings. For the initial two years of implementation, Upjohn had a WIF program manager who spent 100 percent of their time on SWMERN-E activities, coordinating meetings with West Michigan TEAM, MWSW BST staff, and success coaches from MDHHS and Upjohn, and coordinating with SWMERN-E members. By the end of the second year of the grant, Upjohn decided to utilize an existing program manager to serve part time as the WIF program manager.
- **The MWSW training coordinator** coordinated with training vendors to secure occupational skills training, developed OJT contracts with member firms, and monitored these contracts.

Beyond these ongoing activities, the WIF program manager also helped West Michigan TEAM and SWMERN-E success coaches develop robust relationships with the public workforce system by coordinating meetings among MWSW BST professionals and SWMERN-E success coaches. The joint meetings provided a platform to build trust and rapport between the two sets of staff in order to provide cohesive and coordinated services to the business community in the local area. In addition, the meetings increased collaboration and coordination on behalf of SWMERN-E members and their workers.

Exhibit II-1: Overview of Actors Involved in the SWMERN-E and Their Roles



Source: Site visit interviews with Upjohn, West Michigan TEAM, training providers and success coaches.

## West Michigan TEAM

As the originator of the ERN model, West Michigan TEAM has partnered with lead organizations across the country to assist in the start-up and development of ERNs. Under the WIF grant, Upjohn subcontracted with West Michigan TEAM to ensure that expansion services were implemented with fidelity to the original ERN model. As the ERN administrator, West Michigan TEAM gave the following assistance:

- Provided outreach and marketing materials, such as success coach business cards, a Facebook page, posters, flyers, employee-targeted newsletters, brochures, individual SWMERN webpages, and success coaching videos used in employee orientations;
- Assisted with outreach and marketing to employers in the four-county service area by conducting public meetings with economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, industry associations, and partner organizations, as well as through one-on-one meetings with local firms;
- Coordinated data collection and reporting through a proprietary, internet-based client management platform using Salesforce;<sup>17</sup>
- Offered ongoing communications between SWMERN-E success coaches and with a national learning community made up of other ERN members and lead organizations in Michigan and throughout the United States;
- Coordinated quarterly peer coaching calls among all success coaches in Michigan; and
- Identified ERN model best practices and disseminated them to key personnel at the local, state, and federal levels (e.g., government agencies and elected officials).<sup>18</sup>

## Michigan Works! Southwest

To meet the goals outlined under the WIF grant, Upjohn worked closely with its service arm, MWSW, to assist in identifying jobseekers who could benefit from soft skills and occupational skills training and who could be placed into job openings with SWMERN-E member firms (existing and new members). The WIF program manager also coordinated meetings with the MWSW BST manager and professionals to share information about the ERN model and used these meetings as an opportunity to further engage with the public workforce system. As discussed further in Chapters III and IV, MWSW BST professionals were instrumental in sharing information about the ERN model with local employers and sharing leads with the WIF program manager, West Michigan TEAM, and lead success coach. MWSW staff also shared valuable information with SWMERN-E success coaches about available employment and training services, supportive services, and other valuable services available from the public workforce system so that they could make appropriate referrals to MWSW service centers and other community service providers.

---

<sup>17</sup> West Michigan TEAM used a proprietary system, Salesforce, to maintain administrative data on success coaching services. The platform within the system is referred to as Salesforce.

<sup>18</sup> For example, West Michigan TEAM, along with the WIF program manager and the study team, conducted a presentation at the 2018 National Career Pathways Network Conference held in Kentucky. These organizations also conducted trainings at annual ERN meetings.

## Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

MDHHS served as the employer of record for two success coaches. This contractual relationship between MDHHS and West Michigan Team was established prior to the inception of the WIF grant, in 2012. As the employer of record, MDHHS coordinated with West Michigan Team, Upjohn and its WIF program manager to ensure that its success coaches were meeting the project goals outlined under the WIF grant and were coordinating their efforts with the ERN administrator and MWSW BST. (See Chapter VI on incumbent worker services for a description of success coaches' roles and responsibilities.) MDHHS also worked closely with SWMERN-E members to ensure that any incumbent workers who were eligible for public assistance benefits from their agency had access to timely information about benefit applications, determinations, and benefit levels. The ability of MDHHS success coaches to process applications and determine public benefit levels was an especially valuable service component and aspect of having MDHHS employees serve as success coaches.<sup>19</sup>

## SWMERN-E Educational Training Providers

Upjohn contracted with many service providers to meet the demand for jobseeker and incumbent worker training offered through the WIF grant. Through contracts, success coaches developed new linkages and referral processes with local service providers to assist incumbent workers in addressing their educational and skills development needs. Upjohn primarily contracted with local community colleges and private training vendors to offer educational services under the grant. These organizations were selected because they offered training that was in demand among local employers, the pricing was reasonable, and they were responsive in providing training in a timely manner to jobseekers and incumbent workers. Training and educational service providers included:

- **Comstock Public Schools Community Education (CPS)**, a public high school located in Kalamazoo, Michigan, that provided its Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program to WIF participants—both jobseekers and incumbent workers.
- **Glen Oaks Community College (GOCC)**, a public, regionally accredited college in St. Joseph County that provided leadership training.
- **Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC)**, a public community college located in Kalamazoo, Michigan, that provided leadership training and short-term training programs for Production Technician, Certified Numerical Control (CNC), Culinary, and Warehousing.
- **Kellogg Community College (KCC)**, a public community college in Battle Creek, Michigan, that provided leadership and CNA training.
- **Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency (KRESA)**, a public education institution located in Kalamazoo County that provided onsite soft skills training at a member firm's manufacturing facility.

---

<sup>19</sup> Chapter X provides a discussion of sustainability and replicability of the SWMERN-E model. As discussed in that section, MDHHS no longer serves as the employer of record for any of the success coaches. Rather, Upjohn serves as the employer of record, effective October 2018.

- **Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI)**, a public vocational school in Plainwell, Michigan, that provided CNA training programs. Most of its student body has a diagnosed physical or learning disability, but the vocational school also serves recovering substance abuse users and veterans from within the four-county service area.
- **Ross Medical Education Center (RMEC)**, a for-profit allied health school with two locations in Southwest Michigan that provided CNA training.
- **Southwest Childcare Resources**, a nonprofit organization in Portage, Michigan, that provided the curriculum and instructors for the Child Development Associate (CDA) incumbent worker training program. This training led to an industry-recognized certification for many low-wage, low-skilled daycare workers.
- **Thomas Tamandl (independent contractor)** provides English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes in the local community. Under contract to Upjohn, he provided specialized onsite ESL classes to employees at a member firm's manufacturing facility.
- **Urban Alliance, Inc.**, a nonprofit organization operating soft skills training through its Momentum employment program throughout Kalamazoo, Michigan. Under contract, the organization delivered employment and life-skills training to eligible jobseekers enrolled in SWMERN-E project. Under its Momentum program, its staff provided a 90-hour, six-week employment and training program focused on cognitive behavioral principles, including employment readiness and computer literacy.

Additional information on the training providers and their programs of study under the SWMERN-E project can be found in Chapter VI on incumbent worker services and Chapter VII on jobseeker services.

## Local Financial Institutions

In 2014, prior to the launch of the WIF grant, the SWMERN established loan and savings programs for workers with two local financial institutions, Omni Credit Union and KALSEE Credit Union. (The loans are referred to as “hardship loans” because they bridge an immediate need that may impact workers’ productivity or ability to maintain employment.) These short-term programs allowed success coaches to connect workers to fair and reputable lending institutions rather than rely on high-interest rate “payday loans.” These loans were designed to help workers meet an emergency need, such as an automobile repair, replacement of a broken household appliance, a security deposit on new housing, or a family emergency. Such programs were offered as a last resort when other available supportive services could not be garnered from the local public workforce system or community partners. A loan was made by a financial institution partner, such as a credit union, and repayment began with the first paycheck after the loan was approved. Additional detailed information about the loan and savings programs is available in Chapter VI on incumbent worker services.

## Other SWMERN-E Partnerships

The primary actors in the SWMERN-E program—Upjohn (and its service arm MWSW), West Michigan TEAM, and MDHHS—relied on partnerships with other organizations, such as employer associations, industry associations, and community and faith-based organizations, to assist with a variety of program elements. As described in this section, these partners provided Upjohn, West Michigan

TEAM, and MDHHS with critical connections to local employers and resources in education and training, economic and workforce development, and supportive services.

- **Employer organizations and industry associations.** The WIF program manager and program staff participated in monthly meetings with economic development and industry associations. (See Appendix C for a list of employer and industry associations that offered industry-specific information sessions and hosted employer engagement activities.) West Michigan TEAM, the lead success coach, and the WIF program manager also held individual and group meetings of the Southwest Regional Partners group, which helped to raise awareness of the SWMERN-E. Upjohn, West Michigan TEAM, and the success coaches used a variety of employer organizations as referral sources for local businesses that could benefit from SWMERN-E participation.
- **Nonprofit community and faith-based organizations.** Relationships with community and faith-based organizations helped the SWMERN-E project maximize leveraged resources by providing needed resources and services for workers to retain employment with member companies. To involve these organizations in their project efforts, SWMERN-E team members attended monthly and quarterly meetings with a variety of service providers throughout the four-county service area. (See Appendix D for a list of community and faith-based organizations that hosted information sessions and partner engagement meetings.) These meetings were used to share information about the SWMERN-E model and to identify partner organizations to which the success coaches could make referrals for incumbent worker supports (e.g., legal assistance, childcare, transportation, housing, domestic violence and substance abuse services, training, etc.).

Relationships with these employer, community, and faith-based organizations were vital in helping SWMERN-E staff to spread knowledge about the ERN model and identify organizations willing to assist success coaches in serving member firms' incumbent workers.

## **SWMERN-E Operations and Governance**

This section of the report addresses the operational structure of the SWMERN-E. It includes information about member meetings and governance, including an assessment of SWMERN-E members' engagement with one another, which is derived from baseline survey data collected by SPR.

### ***Governance and Communication Structure***

A distinctive feature of the ERN model is the commitment to creating a network of employers who work collectively to address common issues their employees face.

## Governance

ERNs are self-governing, which requires members to coordinate meetings and events and to determine how decisions will be made (e.g., based on a majority vote). As investors in the ERN, employers are voting members, and each business has a single vote on the board. Given that ERNs are not separate legal entities, the SWMERN-E did not have a separate formal board as most nonprofit organizations do. Rather, the SWMERN-E elected a lead business representative to serve as the chair of its network. This individual worked collaboratively with West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, and success coaches to ensure monthly meetings were held and that businesses were engaged in understanding the model and its expansion under the WIF grant.

“I think [SWMERN-E membership] has also been a benefit [because it allowed us] to network with other employers. ...[X company] is also a member of the ERN, and so, while we had a little bit of a connection there, we now have a bigger connection.”

**SWMERN-E Member**

## Monthly Meetings

SWMERN-E members met monthly, usually in person, to network with each other regarding HR challenges and strategies. In general, at these meetings, success coaches briefed members about services provided to their incumbent workforce, outcomes, and success stories. Strategic partners were also invited to attend so that they could share relevant information with member firms about available services, upcoming changes, and topics of interest (e.g., transportation, childcare, workplace diversity, training needs, etc.). Given employers' limited time, it was important to minimize the burden of these meetings on members. West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches found that holding breakfast meetings generated better attendance than afternoon events. West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches also found that holding smaller network meetings in multiple areas across the geographic service area in Kalamazoo, Calhoun, and St. Joseph Counties also led to better attendance by employers in the rural communities.

Under the SWMERN-E, there were three separate networks, each holding separate meetings in Calhoun County (Battle Creek), Kalamazoo County, and St. Joseph County. The rationale behind having three separate network meetings was that members would not have to travel long distances to attend them. In addition, the ERN administrator and success coaches believed that employers from the same geographic area may have had similar issues and needs and therefore could benefit from monthly meetings. Focus groups conducted with SWMERN-E members confirmed the importance of having meetings near where employers were operating, as many of the representatives at the meetings were middle- to upper-management level and had to be judicious in how they spent their time. Thus, limiting travel outside of their area of operations for SWMERN-E meetings helped to ensure frequent participation. However, in order to encourage coordination and networking across the entire network, the SWMERN-E also held quarterly meetings of the entire network of members in Southwest Michigan.

The SWMERN-E monthly meetings allowed business members to establish informal networking ties with other member firms in their local area. Focus groups conducted during each round of site visits with SWMERN-E members confirmed that they valued the following aspects of monthly SWMERN-E meetings:

- The opportunity to network and engage with other members around HR issues;
- The opportunity to develop stronger ties with individual businesses through in-person meetings; and
- The opportunity to connect to community resources and learn about opportunities for their workers and business operations.

“I like being a part of the [SWMERN-E] because it’s a good networking opportunity.”

**SWMERN-E Member**

## Challenges in SWMERN-E Administration and Project Management

Upjohn faced several challenges administering the SWMERN-E project, many of which occurred during the initial phases of grant implementation:

- **The WIF program manager position underwent two changes during the grant period, which affected implementation.** The first WIF program manager left the position within the first year of project implementation, which delayed planning and early implementation efforts. Experiencing major staffing changes at the top level of the project in the first year and subsequent years of implementation meant that Upjohn had to redirect and focus its efforts to ensure successful implementation. Rather than recruiting for a full-time program manager, Upjohn decided to use one of its existing staff members to serve in this role. This individual was well respected within the organization and had prior experience with managing US DOL grants and programs.
- **The ERN model is trademarked by West Michigan TEAM, which means that all decisions regarding it had to be approved by and organized with West Michigan TEAM's leadership group.** Initially, the ERN administrator took the lead in outreach and marketing the ERN model in Southwest Michigan. Due to scheduling conflicts, however, other entities (Upjohn, the WIF program manager, the resource navigator, and the lead success coach) took a more active role in conducting outreach and marketing events across the region during grant implementation. In addition, Upjohn relied on data from West Michigan TEAM on success coaching interventions at member firms to assess service counts and return on investment. Because the management information system was owned and operated by West Michigan TEAM and not by Upjohn, it was difficult to add data elements and refine reporting and analysis for programmatic improvement. Also, Upjohn sometimes experienced delays in obtaining needed performance and fiscal reports from West Michigan TEAM.
- **It took time for Upjohn to identify a subject-matter expert and negotiate a contract to offer career pathways training to its MWSW BST professionals and SWMERN-E success coaches.** This led to significant delays in working with SWMERN-E members to develop internal career pathways. Upjohn did not have internal capacity to assist member firms in developing career pathways and therefore relied on external experts to assist in training success coaches and SWMERN-E members on career pathways development, a new component under the WIF grant. The process of finding a content expert and contracting

for their services was lengthy, which delayed the rollout of this grant component. (Chapter V contains greater detail on career pathways development.)

As outlined in this chapter, the SWMERN-E project involved a complex administrative system, with a national ERN administrator, West Michigan TEAM, Upjohn contractors, and community partners all working together to implement the model. SWMERN-E benefited from the resources available to Upjohn (as the administrative arm of the WIOA program) and its strong coordination with MWSW staff (its service arm). However, the project still faced challenges trying to increase employer engagement in the two rural counties. Unlike many demonstration projects that are testing new program elements, the SWMERN-E project had an already well-established core group of staff (West Michigan TEAM and experienced success coaches) upon which Upjohn could build its efforts. Upjohn's strong history in research and quality program design helped it to be responsive to implementation challenges under the grant and allowed the WIF program manager to use a strong network of community partners and organizations to assist with outreach and marketing efforts and service interventions.

The remainder of this report describes how Upjohn and its partners designed and delivered the specific elements of the SWMERN-E model. Specifically, the chapters focus on recruitment of new employers; identification of employer training needs; recruitment and intake of jobseekers and incumbent workers; success coaching services; and education, training, and placement, detailing the challenges encountered during implementation of these service delivery elements.

### III. Building a Foundation for Collaboration the Public Workforce System

---

An important component of the expansion envisioned under the WIF grant was building strong collaborative relationships between SWMERN-E members, West Michigan TEAM, and the public workforce system, which was a key partner. Given employers' needs for skilled labor and the public workforce system's emphasis on serving jobseekers *and* employers, Upjohn sought to bring the SWMERN-E and the local public workforce system together through its One-Stop service delivery system, called MWSW service centers, to better serve the business community. This chapter reviews the context for engaging that system, the role of the system in engaging employers—and specifically SWMERN-E members—in the community, the integration of grant-funded staff within the system, and challenges and successes related to workforce system engagement.

#### Key Findings

- **A coordinated service delivery approach for business engagement activities was established.** Most ERNs throughout the United States remain separate from their public workforce system in order to maintain independence and ensure businesses' needs are prioritized. Under the WIF grant, SWMERN-E success coaches developed a much closer working relationship with BST professionals in MWSW service centers. Success coaches and BST professionals worked together to coordinate their outreach and recruitment activities, leading to significant increases in local businesses joining the SWMERN-E during the grant's period of performance. To a lesser extent, the public workforce system was also able to work in a coordinated fashion, filling SWMERN-E members' job vacancies and helping to facilitate training for their incumbent workers. (These areas are addressed in Chapters VI and VII.)
- **The focus of BST staff and success coaches became less transactional and more relational over time.** Success coaches and BST professionals reported that they focused their efforts on developing strong, lasting relationships with businesses, rather than simply meeting a single need. One of the promising findings from this evaluation is that SWMERN-E members worked closely with MWSW to provide training for in-demand occupations needed by their firms, and this closer relationship led to increased satisfaction on the part of its business members. (See Chapter IX on outcomes.) Focus group respondents said that the WIF funding helped them maintain a competitive advantage by providing much-needed managerial and supervisory training to their employees.
- **Project staff developed an understanding of individual business needs and provided services to meet those specific needs.** Having a seat at the table during SWMERN-E meetings provided public workforce system professionals with an opportunity to listen in on very candid discussions about employers' individual and collective needs, some of which went beyond the workforce. This created opportunities for success coaches and BST professionals to look for innovative ways to address employers' specific challenges and to build the capacity of the public workforce system to innovate.

## **The Business Engagement Climate Prior to WIF**

Prior to the WIF grant-funded project, there was very little coordination or collaboration between the SWMERN and the public workforce system. In its role as the administrative entity for WIOA Title I and TANF funds, Upjohn was present at SWMERN meetings from 2012 to 2014, but Upjohn representatives mainly listened and presented information to member companies. When the request for proposals was released by US DOL, Upjohn staff members saw an opportunity to build on their relationships with local employers already involved in the SWMERN by building stronger linkages with employers and bringing additional resources that could potentially help firms address some of their challenges.

One of the essential components under the WIF grant was building stronger ties between the SWMERN-E members and the public workforce system, which was meant to occur in the form of incumbent worker training opportunities, jobseeker training for in-demand occupations, and a stronger emphasis on internal business career pathways (all of which are discussed in greater detail in the remaining chapters of the report). Including the public workforce system in the ERN service delivery model was also seen as an opportunity to bring staff responsible for local business engagement services together, regardless of their funding source, under a comprehensive and coordinated umbrella.

As part of their private–public partnership operating model, ERNs have always relied to some extent on the bevy of federal and state-funded programs available through the public workforce system and on community service providers who offer supportive services and training opportunities. Under the WIF grant, however, Upjohn envisioned a much more seamless service delivery design: Embedding ERN success coaches within local businesses would enable them to directly provide workers with needed supports, thereby potentially reducing the burden on the public workforce system.

Contextually, the WIF grant and the vision for better integration between SWMERN and the public workforce came at an advantageous time for three reasons. First, steadily tightening labor markets in Southwest Michigan made the public workforce system an attractive partner for many SWMERN-E members who reported difficulty finding workers with the requisite skills needed for employment. Second, the geographic reach of Upjohn serving as the local administrative entity for MWSW expanded from a two-county region to a four-county region. As a national leader in employment and training research, Upjohn was perceived by employers in the four-county area to be business-friendly, which allowed employers to have greater trust for engaging with the public workforce system. Finally, the continued availability of state funds for incumbent worker training through Michigan Works! service centers made the public workforce system a more attractive partner to the local business community. The culmination of all these changes made Southwest Michigan a ripe environment for stronger integration of the public workforce system into the SWMERN.

## **Role of Public Workforce System in Business Service Design and Delivery**

While Michigan's public workforce development system has long provided services to businesses, in the late 1990s and early 2000s these services were mainly viewed by workforce professionals as a way to develop placement opportunities for unemployed and underemployed individuals in the

employment and job training community.<sup>20</sup> From the employer perspective, most services to businesses had been couched as services to jobseekers, justified only by recognizing that businesses are the other half of the employment equation. Beginning in the early 2000s, the State of Michigan and local workforce development staff began to place greater emphasis on expanding business services by focusing on incumbent worker training and the needs of individual employers in their communities. To address the employment and training needs of employers, the state encouraged the local public workforce system to establish business service teams comprised of dedicated staff trained to work with local employers to address their workforce needs.

### ***Impetus for Developing a Business Services Team***

The focus on employers as primary partners and customers of the public workforce system has been a long-held philosophy for Upjohn, which is always looking for new ways to better serve employers. However, under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the Michigan Works! Directors' Council in 2012—comprised of all the Michigan local workforce area directors—adopted a demand-driven definition that identified employers as the primary customer of the public workforce system. This focus on employers allowed for regional approaches to serving employers and for local Michigan Works! directors and their staff to develop local solutions for meeting the needs of employers.

The emphasis on business engagement and service delivery led many Michigan Works! local areas to coordinate specialized business service teams (BSTs). Starting in 2013, the Michigan Works! Association began coordinating The Business Solutions Professional (BSP) Certification Training Program to train state and local workforce development staff and their partners on engaging with businesses in their local communities. Along with many of its counterparts in Michigan, MWSW organized its own BST whose primary role is to engage regularly with industry associations, business-affiliated groups and individual employers to address their employment and training needs and to identify funding that can be used to support the needs of local employers.

### ***Role of Public Workforce System's Business Services Team***

In Southwest Michigan, the public workforce system has invested significant resources in training and certifying BST professionals to work directly with employers and community partners. These dedicated staff have been assigned to conduct the following duties:

- Establish open communications with local employers;
- Provide information to businesses and their intermediaries (e.g., chambers of commerce, employer associations, economic development agencies) via direct face-to-face interaction about available federal and state employment and training programs and community services;
- Collect information about the individual workforce and skill needs of local businesses; and
- Engage employers in identifying needed workforce development programs, including sector strategies.

---

<sup>20</sup> For a history of workforce development programs and services in Michigan, see <http://www.michiganworks.org/about-michigan-works/history-of-innovation/>.

Southwest Michigan's BST comprises approximately 15 professionals representing various partner organizations responsible for delivering federal and state programs—such as WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth, and TANF—that are required to conduct regular business engagement activities with employers and their business intermediaries. BST professionals are in daily contact in person, by telephone, and/or by email with local businesses to gather information and inform employers about available programs and services, including the state's job-matching system, state training grants, OJT and work experience opportunities, worker profiling, and state bonding programs.

"The BST in Kalamazoo is phenomenal. They're very active. They're very engaged. They're very out [in the community]."

**SWMERNE Success Coach**

### ***Types of Business Services Offered by Public Workforce System***

The Southwest Michigan BST offers a core set of business services that typically include labor exchange services, rapid response and downsizing assistance, job fairs, jobseeker assessment, labor market information, space for interviewing job applicants, and information on tax credits and bonding services. Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, the Southwest Michigan BST focuses on customizing information and materials to more closely match individual business needs.

Exhibit III-1 provides a brief description of the types of business services offered by the BST in the local area. The types of services offered by the MWSW BST align well with the ERN model and the needs of its business members. Thus, finding ways to better integrate and coordinate the work of SWMERNE success coaches and BST professionals seemed like a natural fit to reduce duplication and ensure that the needs of the business community were central in the public workforce development system's service design and delivery.

### Exhibit III-1: Types of Business Services Provided by MWSW BST

| <u>Service Type</u>                           | <u>Service Description</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Labor Exchange Services</b>                | BST staff assist businesses with creating and posting job descriptions on the statewide job matching system. BST staff also assess jobseekers' hard and soft skills and match them (either manually or using the state's automated job matching system) to suitable job descriptions using resume reviews and assessments to match potential qualified job applicants.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Job Fairs/Hiring Events</b>                | BST staff organize job fairs with local program staff, partner agencies, and employer associations. Typically, these fairs occur two to four times a year and are held at various public locations. They are often large-scale events that attract numerous jobseekers with widely varying skills and a diverse group of businesses. BST staff also conduct industry-specific jobs fairs for demand occupations in the local area, as well as an "Employer of the Day" hiring event where staff recruit for multiple positions with a single employer, collect applications and resumes on behalf of the employer, conduct group or one-on-one interviews, and provide dedicated space in MWSW service centers to host the event. |
| <b>Labor Market Information (LMI)</b>         | LMI and analysis is usually available from state staff, but MWSW also has proprietary systems that allow staff to conduct more detailed and timely analysis for employers in the community. BST staff use detailed LMI analysis to help employers understand if they are competitive with other employers in the area in terms of pay and benefits                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Rapid Response/Outplacement Assistance</b> | In collaboration with the state workforce development agency, BST staff assist with Rapid Response services to employers facing layoffs or closure. These services involve an initial meeting between state Rapid Response and local area staff to discuss how they will serve the business and its laid-off workers. While BST members stated that they would like to work with companies to help them mitigate layoffs, they are usually focused on connecting downsized workers with other employers and community resources and services.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Information Requests</b>                   | BST staff provide information to businesses regarding tax credit programs, labor laws, unemployment insurance, Federal Fidelity Bonding Program, and available training opportunities. <sup>21</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Interviewing Facilities</b>                | MWSW allow employers to use their service centers for interviewing, occasionally even scheduling interviews for employers. MWSW also conducts prescreening for employers, if requested.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Customized Assessments</b>                 | MWSW offers numerous occupational and basic skills assessments for jobseekers, including WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certification and customized assessments. These assessments are usually offered at MWSW service centers, as they are administered on computers, typically using licensed software, and/or they must be proctored by staff certified to administer them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Training Services</b>                      | Training services include OJT (which requires the employer to pay the wages and then the employer is reimbursed for a portion of the wages per the OJT Agreement), wage reimbursements, customized classroom training grants, and other incumbent worker training.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Source: Site visit interview with MWSW business service team manager on September 19, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> The Federal Fidelity Bonding Program allows employers to purchase bonds to indemnify themselves for loss of money or property sustained through the dishonest acts of their employees.

## **Integration of Public Workforce System BST Staff and SWMERN-E Success Coaches**

Integration of the public workforce system with the ERN model was achieved by housing both sets of staff—success coaches and BST professionals—within the Title I WIOA administrative entity for the local area. The two success coaches hired by MDHHS remained with their employer of record during the WIF grant period, but a decision was collectively made by West Michigan TEAM, MDHHS management, and Upjohn to transition these positions to Upjohn’s service arm at the end of the grant. This allowed for the creation of a more cohesively linked team of business services staff to provide both the traditional services described in Exhibit III-1 and ERN model services. As described in Chapter II, most of the SWMERN-E project staff members were employed by Upjohn. This included three success coaches, the WIF program manager, and a training coordinator who helped oversee OJT contracts and training provider agreements, as well as administrative staff who assisted with invoicing and expenditure reports.

Embedding staff within the Michigan Works! system ensured that staff from various programs—including WIOA Title III, Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth, TANF employment and training, and Vocational Rehabilitation—were establishing relationships with SWMERN-E success coaches and with one another, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of each other’s target groups, services, and program components. This integration was set to continue after the WIF grant period ends, as all success coaches were to be housed within the Michigan Works! entity when Upjohn takes over as administrator of the SWMERN-E. (This transition will be described in more detail in Chapter X.) Integration of the BST team and success coaches occurred through a variety of means, including pre-grant and early implementation coordination; sharing of information, expertise, and resources; and coordination of activities and services. The remainder of this section describes each of these integration efforts.

### ***Pre-Grant and Early Implementation Coordination***

The integration of workforce system staff in the SWMERN began prior to the grant period. MWSW staff members participated in SWMERN meetings conducted in Battle Creek and Kalamazoo when the SWMERN started in 2012. Michigan Works! staff members were invited to attend these meetings to help address SWMERN members’ concerns, where appropriate. Over the years, the relationship between SWMERN members, West Michigan TEAM, and MWSW grew and helped solidify the idea that the public workforce system needed to be better integrated with the work of SWMERN members and their success coaches.

Then, in the early stages of WIF grant implementation, Upjohn had a WIF advisory committee that helped to strategize about how various elements of the SWMERN-E project could be achieved during the grant cycle. This advisory committee had representatives from the MWSW BST and West Michigan TEAM as well as the WIF program manager from Upjohn and the SWMERN-E resource navigator. They worked collectively to design the services and implement the program elements identified in the WIF grant application.

## Sharing Information, Expertise, and Resources Across Programs

Once grant implementation began—and particularly in 2017, once Upjohn became the employer of record for most of the success coaches—having BST staff and SWMERN-E success coaches housed under one umbrella organization increased opportunities for them to share information, expertise, and resources in the following ways:

- **SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff were cross-trained on each other's services and programs.** As noted earlier, existing MWSW BST professionals representing each of the four counties received training on the ERN model and how to market it to employers during their business engagement activities. SWMERN-E success coaches stated that they saw a rise in employer referrals from MWSW BST professionals after WIF implementation began, which helped to drive interest in SWMERN-E membership in the local business community. On the other side, SWMERN-E success coaches were cross-trained on MWSW business services, such as conducting assessments for employers, screening resumes, referring qualified job applicants, and offering training through OJT and apprenticeship programs. Success coaches received training on available public resources, such as the state labor exchange system and other state and government programs that could potentially benefit SWMERN-E members and their workforce.
- **MWSW public workforce system staff shared information about OJT policies and processes with success coaches.** MWSW staff have a tremendous amount of expertise administering and monitoring OJT contracts, and they shared this expertise with the SWMERN-E resource navigator and success coaches. The SWMERN-E resource navigator along with the training coordinator—a MWSW staff member who was partially funded by the WIF grant—were responsible for documenting incumbent worker OJT contracts and OJT participant performance reviews. Both staff members received guidance from Upjohn's administrative staff on how to meet all the administrative and fiscal requirements pertaining to OJT, including how to write an OJT contract, how to ensure the trainee was adequately supervised, and how to monitor the OJT for successful completion of skills and competencies. The SWMERN-E resource navigator also received training on the financial monitoring of OJTs from MWSW staff.
- **MWSW public workforce system staff shared information on career pathways development with success coaches.** The public workforce system has extensive expertise with career pathways design, especially as it relates to training programs and which jobs can be obtained based on credential attainment. As discussed in Chapter V, success coaches worked alongside individual employers to help them build career pathways for their respective organizations. While the public workforce system and SWMERN-E success coaches may be approaching career pathways from different vantage points, with SWMERN-E staff focusing their efforts on helping business members create internal career paths within their respective companies, all the discussions held under the WIF

“The SWMERN-E program manager conducted a training and talked about the model, educated everybody, taught them the process on how to make a referral, what staff needs to look for, like if they're a good fit...I think that really helped.”

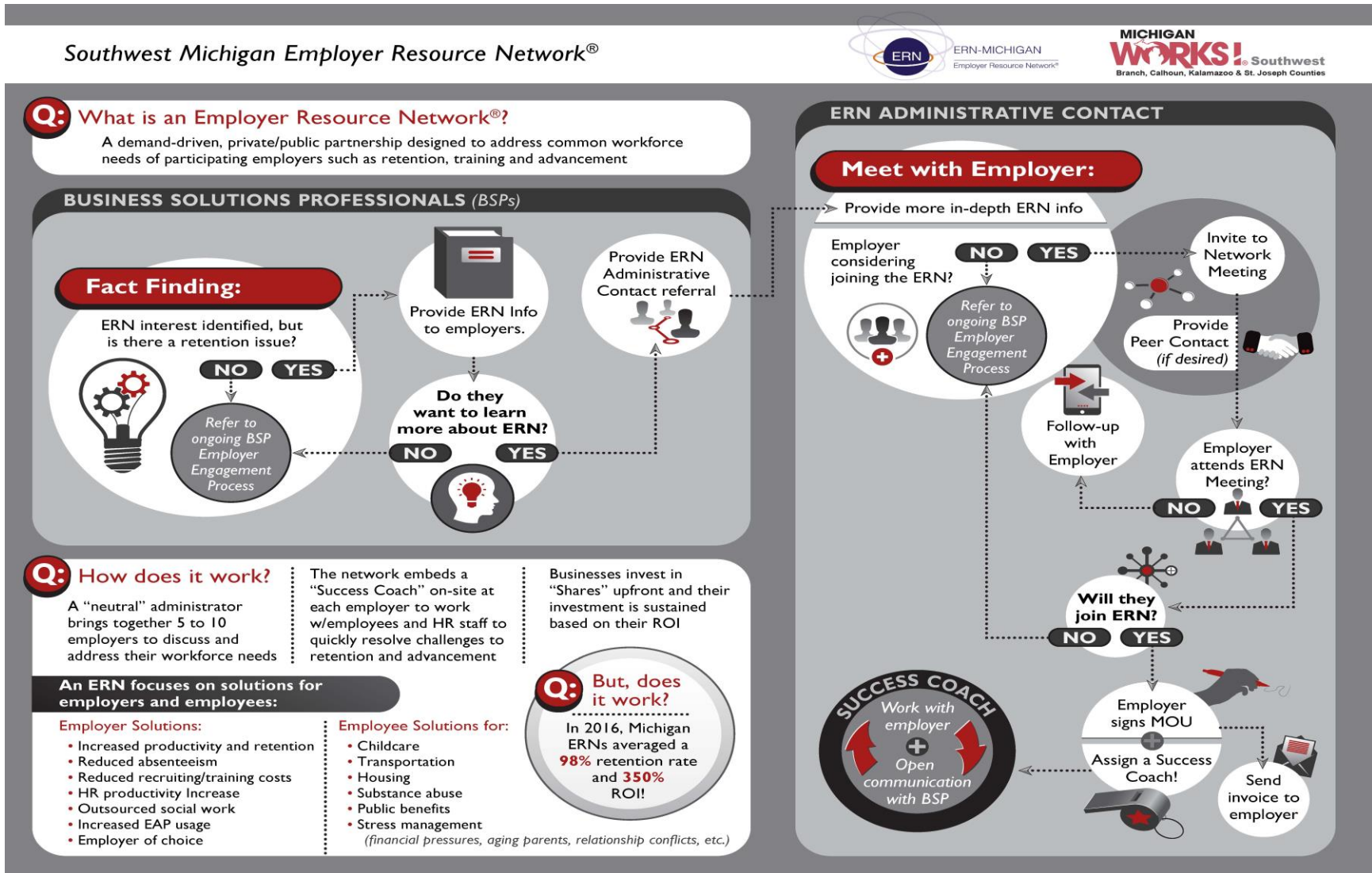
MWSW BST Coordinator

grant added collectively to the expertise of the public workforce system to further the use of career pathways in the local area. (Chapter V goes into greater detail about career pathways development and use under the WIF grant.)

- **MWSW public workforce system staff shared information on available training providers with SWMERN-E staff.** SWMERN-E success coaches and the resource navigator worked closely with Upjohn and Michigan Works! staff to identify appropriate training vendors for WIF-funded short-term jobseeker and incumbent worker training programs. Using well-established and tested training providers like KVCC, KCC, and Urban Alliance (the soft skills training provider) ensured that the training component envisioned under the expanded service design was achieved as planned. Also, by working with the public workforce system to identify training providers, SWMERN-E staff ensured that the training providers selected were reputable.
- **Upjohn shared its expertise in addressing administrative requirements with the SWMERN-E project staff.** Upjohn has its own staff that provides technical assistance when it comes to programmatic and financial reporting. The finance staff at Upjohn worked closely with SWMERN-E staff to assist them with financial and program reporting requirements and proper accounting procedures. Staff also shared their expertise with public workforce system programs and administrative requirements with SWMERN-E staff to ensure they met US DOL programmatic and fiscal requirements.
- **Public workforce system and SWMERN-E staff shared information on business engagement activities via their management information systems.** Both the public workforce system and the SWMERN-E success coaches used a proprietary system, Salesforce, to collect and document employer engagement activities and services. The SWMERN-E Salesforce interface was customized for success coach use. So, while the public workforce system and SWMERN-E success coaches used the same vendor, they had different licensing agreements and their own unique interfaces within the system. The SWMERN-E lead success coach was given access to the BST's Salesforce system so she could document employers participating in the SWMERN-E, and so BST professionals could coordinate with the appropriate success coach, as needed.

Exhibit III-2 illustrates how the SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff worked in a coordinated fashion to serve employers in their community. This graphic was developed by the US DOL national technical assistance provider for the WIF grantees, Maher and Maher, for Upjohn to represent the relationship of the MWSW BST staff and SWMERN-E success coaching staff. As depicted, MWSW BST professionals conducted fact-finding meetings with local employers to understand their employment and hiring needs and shared information from these events with SWMERN-E success coaches and West Michigan TEAM. If, during their engagement activities, an employer identified the need to address employee retention issues, BST professionals would relay this information to West Michigan TEAM and the lead success coach so that they could follow up with the employer directly about possibly joining the SWMERN-E. Similarly, if, in conversation with a SWMERN-E success coach, an employer identified a hiring need or discussed wanting to start their own pre-apprenticeship and/or apprenticeship program, the SWMERN-E success coach would relay this information back to the BST professionals so they could coordinate with the employer directly. This symbiotic relationship between the SWMERN-E success coaches and BST professionals helped improve service delivery to SWMERN-E members.

## Exhibit III-2: Coordination Between SWMERN-E Success Coaches and MWSW BST Professionals



Source: Maher and Maher, prepared for Upjohn in 2018.

## Coordinating Activities and Services

Upjohn grant staff, particularly the WIF program manager, stated that they were “intentional” about their efforts to coordinate SWMERN-E services to member employers with those offered by BST professionals. Although the ERN model may not have been the right fit for every employer in the service area, having staff members from the public workforce system and SWMERN-E share information about available services and programs with employers during their outreach and marketing events helped to create a holistic approach to employer services rather than fostering competing and siloed initiatives. To create an integrated, seamless service delivery system for employers, BST staff and SWMERN-E success coaches worked in a coordinated fashion to serve employers through the following approaches:

- **Program referrals across the two programs were done collaboratively.** MWSW and its WIOA service providers collaborated with SWMERN-E success coaches to screen jobseekers and made referrals to local employers for direct hires and for WIF-funded jobseeker training programs. A wide variety of workforce and community partners (e.g., TANF, Goodwill Industries, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Urban Alliance) were informed about the WIF-supported training programs and recommended the training modules to their customers. For example, parole officers, substance abuse counselors, and Michigan Vocational Rehabilitation staff were briefed about the ERN model and available services; these public workforce system partners worked to ensure that jobseekers were knowledgeable about the necessary skills and competencies of local SWMERN-E members and that they were referred to MWSW service centers for jobseeker screenings.
- **Employer outreach and engagement activities were coordinated.** SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST professionals worked collaboratively to ensure employers in the local areas were informed about *all* available services and programs that could benefit their existing workforce, and they helped these employers find skilled labor. The MWSW BST staff and success coaches worked diligently to create a team approach to business engagement. This included BST professionals sharing information about the SWMERN-E with employers, and success coaches sharing information about public workforce services and initiatives with SWMERN-E members. An important result of this improved coordination was that SWMERN-E members had more exposure to—and improved perceptions of—the local public workforce system. In focus group interviews, several employer members commented that participation in the SWMERN-E provided them with the opportunity to engage directly with public workforce system personnel, which improved their understanding of how the system works for both employers and jobseekers. Several employers added that the integrated service delivery allowed them to have an open mind about hiring jobseekers with employment barriers, so

“It wasn’t SWMERN and MWSW BST, it was a team working to address the employers’ needs. ...SWMERN members understand our services greater because they’re part of the ERN, and so there is an openness and a willingness to consider being involved in different events and job fairs...because they know us, and they know [MWSW] can help them.”

**MWSW BST Manager**

insofar as many of them successfully completed WIF-funded training programs and came highly recommended by community partners. One employer stated, “SWMERN has been a really great thing for us, too. [We are] trying to find these areas within the community that maybe we wouldn’t have explored before, trying to find employees. And that’s worked out really well for us. So, just kind of keeping our minds open to other possibilities.”

## Challenges Incorporating the Public Workforce System into the ERN Model

There were two main challenges in incorporating the public workforce system into the ERN model. Specifically:

- **Keeping the ERN model’s branding intact, given the state’s adoption of a nearly identical strategy.** In late 2018, Michigan offered state-supported grants to local workforce development areas (LWDAs) interested in starting Business Resource Networks (BRNs) within their employer community. The BRNs operate under the same methodology as the ERNs and are marketed statewide by Michigan Works! service center staff located in the LWDAs as a job retention and job productivity business strategy. While West Michigan TEAM tried to work with the state to have the model remain coordinated with, but independent of, Michigan Works! service centers, they were unable to come to an agreement. So, the state simply changed the name and marketed the program as a BRN instead of an ERN. Interestingly, many of the areas that considered implementing BRNs requested assistance from local areas in Michigan with existing ERNs to document services and report outcomes to their employer networks. The Salesforce database was licensed to these areas through agreements with West Michigan TEAM, however, and the algorithm used to assess return on investment has not been shared with the BRNs, as it is part of the ERN’s trademark approach.
- **Building trust between employer-serving entities and the public workforce system.** Initially, West Michigan TEAM was reluctant to involve the public workforce system in the ERN model in Southwest Michigan because the approach was meant to be business led and driven, rather than government operated. There was fear that public workforce system processes and procedures would make the SWMERN more bureaucratic and less responsive to business needs, which could potentially discourage businesses from joining. After years of experience working together to address the needs of the business community, however, West Michigan TEAM and MWSW staff began to trust that the system’s administrators and staff had a strong desire to engage in meaningful ways with the business community; they began to see the value of working collaboratively to address employers’ needs around workforce-related issues like education and training.

As presented in the key findings of this chapter, developing relationships with the public workforce system helped to improve service delivery opportunities, including service integration and coordination, for SWMERN-E members and their employees. West Michigan TEAM, SWMERN-E success coaches, and the WIF program manager worked closely with public workforce partners, such as the local workforce development board, economic development entities, and local service providers, to ensure that SWMERN-E members would benefit from all available services and

programs in the local area. The integration of the public workforce system led to more businesses learning about the ERN model and ways the public workforce system could benefit their operations.

Efforts to engage the public workforce system centered around key activities, including sharing information, expertise, and resources, as well as coordinating activities and services to businesses and jobseekers. Many SWMERN-E members' incumbent workers had used the public workforce system for employment and training services, such as unemployment insurance, career awareness and exploration, resume writing, and job referrals. After workers had obtained employment, ERNs were uniquely structured to assist them to retain their employment with post-placement supports coordinated by success coaches. These innovations differentiated the SWMERN-E from existing ERNs by being more focused on integrating MWSW service centers and staff with member employers, employees, and jobseekers.

## IV. Expansion of ERN Model in Southwest Michigan

The SWMERN-E project had two expansion goals: (1) broaden the ERN service delivery model to employers in new geographic areas in the Southwest Michigan Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA), and (2) increase the total number of employer members in the network. This chapter describes how that expansion occurred through efforts to recruit and enroll new ERN members in a wider geographic service area. Data in this chapter come from four rounds of structured interviews with grant-funded staff and employers, as well as from an employer survey.

### Key Findings

- **There was an increase in the total number of new employer members added to the SWMERN during the grant period, as well as expansion in sectoral diversity.** As noted earlier, the project exceeded its membership goal. Additionally, in doing so, the staff recruited businesses from new industry sectors, including daycare, healthcare, and hospitality.
- **In the face of challenges working with the two new counties, grant-funded staff were able to adjust their approach.** West Michigan TEAM staff, along with grant-funded Upjohn staff, increased their efforts to meet collectively and individually with employers in rural Branch and St. Joseph Counties. They sought to actively listen to concerns and encourage participation by allowing employers to meet personally with success coaches. West Michigan TEAM even worked with Upjohn to hire a success coach who resided in Branch County to improve outreach and communication with local employers. In 2017 and 2018, West Michigan TEAM and the lead success coach increased their outreach efforts in Branch County attending over 30 informational events.
- **The expansion enabled the SWMERN-E to successfully experiment with new approaches for engaging employers.** Providing a subsidy for the first year of membership helped to increase the number of employers joining the SWMERN-E during the grant period and provided success coaches time to demonstrate proof of concept to employers. Additionally, utilizing MWSW BST professionals from the One-Stop delivery system for increasing information sharing about the model with local businesses was effective. MWSW BST professionals conducted weekly meetings and roundtables with employers in the four-county area targeted by the WIF grant, which enabled direct access for information sharing with employers.
- **Success coaches saw a rise in employer referrals from economic development and community partner staff, which spurred interest in SWMERN-E membership in the business community.** The WIF program manager relayed that she and the resource navigator were active in conducting information sessions with economic development staff (i.e., Southwest Michigan First) and community-based organizations (e.g., Bethany Christian Services) that work closely within the local area to serve employers of all sizes.

## **SWMERN-E Outreach and Recruitment**

As noted in Chapter I, the original SWMERN included employers from two Michigan counties (Kalamazoo and Calhoun); at the start of the WIF grant, the SWMERN comprised a total of 10 businesses. With grant funding, Upjohn planned to expand or extend its geographic service territory into two additional counties—Branch and St. Joseph. The main driver for the SWMERN expansion was to ensure consistency in business service options, since Branch and St. Joseph Counties, along with Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties, make up the LWDA. Upjohn also set out to increase the total number of employers connected to its local ERN, with the goal of adding 25 new employers, increasing the network to 35 members across all four counties.

Drawing on the partnerships detailed in Chapters II and III, staff from multiple entities coordinated to conduct outreach and to market ERN membership benefits to potential members in order to meet expansion goals. These staff members employed a variety of marketing tools and leveraged resources to raise the profile of the ERN model in the region, all of which contributed to growth in employer members under the grant.

### ***Involvement in Business Engagement Activities***

West Michigan TEAM, the resource navigator, the lead success coach, and the WIF program manager partnered with MWSW BST professionals to market SWMERN-E services to new businesses. Upjohn coordinated with West Michigan TEAM staff to assist in conducting outreach to Southwest Michigan employers and in training MWSW BST professionals to understand the model and how it could help employers improve employee retention and absenteeism.

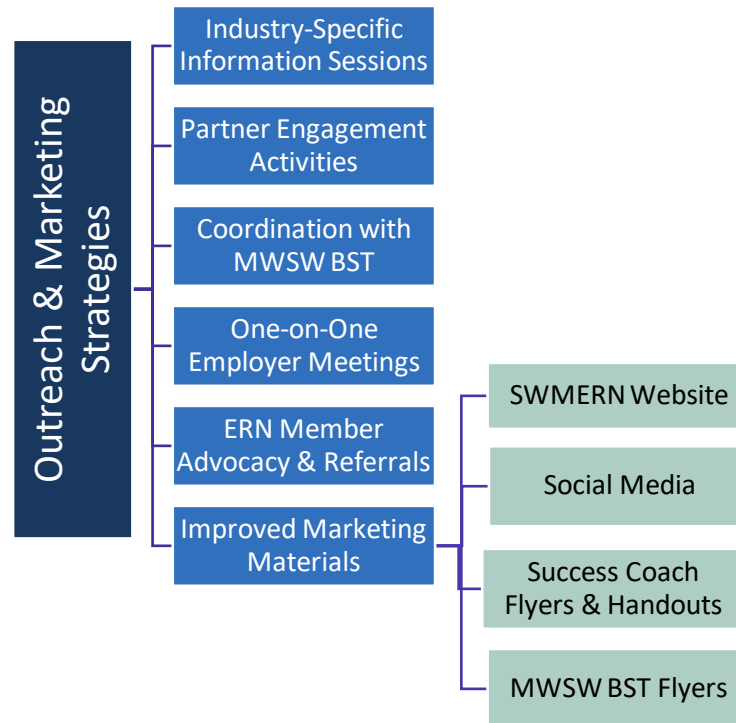
West Michigan TEAM staff members were well positioned to assist success coaches and MWSW staff with employer engagement activities, since the administrative staff conducted information sessions about the ERN model across the country and helped oversee ERN operations throughout Michigan. A nationwide focus of the ERN model is collaborating with small and medium-sized businesses with high employer turnover and absenteeism rates, rather than with large employers who may already have existing resources—such as employee assistance programs and additional HR personnel—to serve their incumbent workforce. Similar to the national focus, recruitment efforts under the SWMERN-E project focused on small and medium-sized businesses. However, if a large employer expressed interest in the SWMERN-E, it was also welcomed to explore membership.

Outreach and marketing to the business community was primarily orchestrated via West Michigan TEAM. However, given that these staff were located in Grand Rapids, Michigan (a two- to three-hour drive from the service area), other members of Upjohn's grant team, including the WIF program manager, resource navigator, lead success coach, and members of the WIOA administrative entity's BST, also played a vital role in disseminating information about the model and eliciting employer involvement. .

### ***Strategies for Engaging Local Businesses***

Grant staff used a variety of outreach strategies to engage the business community in the four-county service area, as shown in Exhibit IV-1.

## Exhibit IV-1: Employer Outreach and Marketing Strategies



Source: Site visit interviews (2015-2018) with Upjohn, West Michigan TEAM and success coaches.

As illustrated in Exhibit IV-1, grant staff and ERN administrative staff primarily used the following strategies to engage the business community:

- **Information sessions throughout the four-county region to help inform business and industry associations about the ERN model.** At the grant's outset, the ERN administrator—West Michigan TEAM—along with the lead success coach, conducted 30- to 60-minute information sessions at employer events, such as economic development events, chambers of commerce meetings, industry association meetings, and HR professional roundtables. These sessions provided business decisionmakers with information about the ERN model and were typically followed by one-on-one meetings with the intent to establish stronger ties with the employer. Grant-funded staff estimated that they conducted and attended over 350 information sessions to engage businesses during the life of the grant.

"I had not heard about the ERN, but during a meeting I heard about it. As soon as I contacted West Michigan TEAM, they were very responsive. It also helped that there was a 50 percent [fee reduction] that paid for the first year. It gives us a chance to see how much the success coach would be utilized."

**New SWMERN-E Member**

- **Partner engagement activities that enabled grant staff to share information about the ERN model and obtain referrals from government agencies and community-based organizations.** West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, the ERN resource navigator, and the ERN lead success coach conducted sessions—similar to those conducted for employers—to share information about the model and elicit the help of partner organizations in making referrals. Many of the organizations targeted for these information sessions were government and community-based organizations that also worked closely with employers to place individuals in employment. The goal was to encourage employers concerned about turnover and absenteeism to contact Upjohn or West Michigan TEAM to discuss joining the ERN.

- **Coordination with MWSW's BST professionals to facilitate additional targeted outreach through their business engagement events.** West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, the resource navigator, and lead success

coach conducted information sessions for BST professionals about the ERN model as part of the effort to utilize the public workforce system to reach additional employers and jobseekers in the local community. During these sessions, grant staff shared background information about the ERN model, the focus of the WIF funding, and strategies that BST professionals could employ in their existing group and individual meetings with employers. As a result of these sessions, MWSW's BST team added information about SWMERN-E services to a flyer they regularly shared with employers during employer visitations and business engagement presentations throughout the community. West Michigan TEAM staff added that the ERN model was not always the right fit for an employer, so it was important that BST members had to recommend employers who were dedicated to implementing programs that would value their workforce needs and who were willing to work collectively with other employers to raise concerns and strategies for addressing retention challenges. Having the BST team conduct outreach enabled them to target employers based on existing relationships and their own assessments of which employers would be the best fit. As shown in Exhibit IV-2, these employers tended to be small and medium-sized with a human service focus and an investment in talent development. Many tended to be from goods-producing sectors with a range of pay and skill levels. They were

#### Exhibit IV-2 Types of Businesses Targeted for SWMERN-E Membership

- Small and medium-sized businesses
- Businesses experiencing retention challenges
- Businesses with a range of pay levels and low- to medium-skilled positions
- Businesses from goods-producing and service sectors (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, food and beverage)
- Human service focus; invested in talent development
- Willingness to work collaboratively with public and private entities

typically experiencing retention challenges and showed a willingness to work in a private–public collaborative.

- **One-on-one meetings with interested employers that enabled grant staff to gather additional information about their incumbent workforce needs, primary industry sectors, and business locations.** In addition to the group information sessions discussed above, West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, the resource navigator, and the lead success coach conducted one-on-one presentations to businesses about the ERN model. In most instances, these meetings were conducted for executives and management-level staff, primarily HR professionals, to discuss their incumbent workforce needs and determine whether a success coach could help remediate some of their workforce challenges. These meetings also allowed the team to gather information regarding the employer’s primary industry sector, expansion plans, and additional business locations. The team used this information to make recommendations on the number of shares the employer might want to purchase. It was labor intensive to conduct these meetings, and it often took multiple connections—calls, emails, meetings—for an employer to commit to becoming a member.
- **ERN member referrals, which were an important by-product of an established SWMERN already operating in the geographic area targeted for expansion.** While not required to do so, existing SWMERN members played a fundamental role as advocates of the ERN model at employer meetings and association events. Grant staff commented that several employers that joined the SWMERN-E over the course of the grant period did so after hearing about it from colleagues. West Michigan TEAM would often recommend that a prospective employer attend one of the local partner network meetings held in Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, or St. Joseph so that the employer get could a feel for topics discussed during ERN meetings.
- **Improved marketing materials to facilitate outreach and information sharing beyond in-person engagement.** With leveraged resources, West Michigan TEAM and the WIF program manager were able to secure funding to revamp the ERN-Michigan website, which contains separate links for SWMERN-E affiliates and their success coaches (see <http://ern-mi.com/network.aspx>). With leveraged funding from the Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo initiative, West Michigan TEAM created separate Facebook and Twitter accounts that the success coaches used for sharing success stories with the Southwest Michigan community. The success coaches also created customized brochures about their services that could be disseminated to employers in specific counties. The MWSW BST manager also designed a pamphlet that was used at employer engagement events to share information about the full continuum of business services in the public workforce system, including information about the SWMERN-E project.

The outreach and enrollment processes used for the expansion featured two approaches that were unique relative to prior ERN efforts. First, using the public workforce system to market ERN membership had not been widely utilized with other ERNs across the country. Most ERNs outside of Southwest Michigan are not well connected with their local public workforce system and, in fact, try to differentiate themselves from the One-Stop delivery system because employers often view it as bureaucratic and not employer focused. According to the CEO of West Michigan TEAM, Upjohn has an established and positive reputation in the local business community; Upjohn also serves as the

administrative entity for MWSW, which (as described in Chapter III) enabled success coaches to forge much stronger relationships with the public workforce system. A second unique feature of the expansion efforts was that the WIF-grant enabled Upjohn to subsidize some costs that would otherwise be borne by ERN members. For example, Upjohn covered 50 percent of the first-year membership dues for businesses that joined during the grant period, which translated into a savings of \$3,500 per ERN share.<sup>22</sup> Staff reported that this incentive helped many local employers who were initially hesitant to join the ERN to become more amenable to the model.

In addition to these specific approaches for *how* to recruit employers, grant staff were also intentional about *which* employers they targeted. While consideration was given to a wide range of businesses representing the local economy, West Michigan TEAM and success coaches felt that small and medium-sized businesses employing predominantly lower-skilled workers were the strongest candidates to engage. (See Exhibit IV-2 for a list of criteria developed by West Michigan TEAM used in targeting business members.) Staff members thought these companies stood to benefit the most because they had smaller HR departments and therefore recognized the value that a success coach would offer their incumbent workforce. Larger firms often have HR departments to support their incumbent workforce; several larger firms reported that they had training divisions that assisted employees with professional development opportunities.

West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, and MWSW BST professionals found the most interest in participating among employers in industries with skilled worker shortages, such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and food service. Interviewees suggested that these industries routinely face worker shortages because their entry-level positions offer lower wages, and individuals often switch employers for small increases (e.g., 10 to 50 cents per hour) or for jobs that have the potential to help them progress into more skilled jobs leading to higher wages.

## **SWMERN-E Member Enrollment**

The success of the above-described efforts to recruit employers to join the ERN can be measured by examining why employers chose to join the ERN, how many employers joined, and which types of employers joined.

### ***Reasons for Joining and Employers' Perceptions of SWMERN-E***

To better understand employers' motivations for joining the SWMERN-E, and to understand if the message being used to market the ERN model resonated with the business community, the study team administered a survey to members in their first few months of joining. In 2016 and 2017, the employer survey was administered in person by the study team. After that, as new members joined, they were asked by their success coach to either complete an online version of the survey via a web-based application or to complete a hard copy instrument (see Appendix B for copies of SWMERN-E survey instruments), which they could send back to the study team.<sup>23</sup>

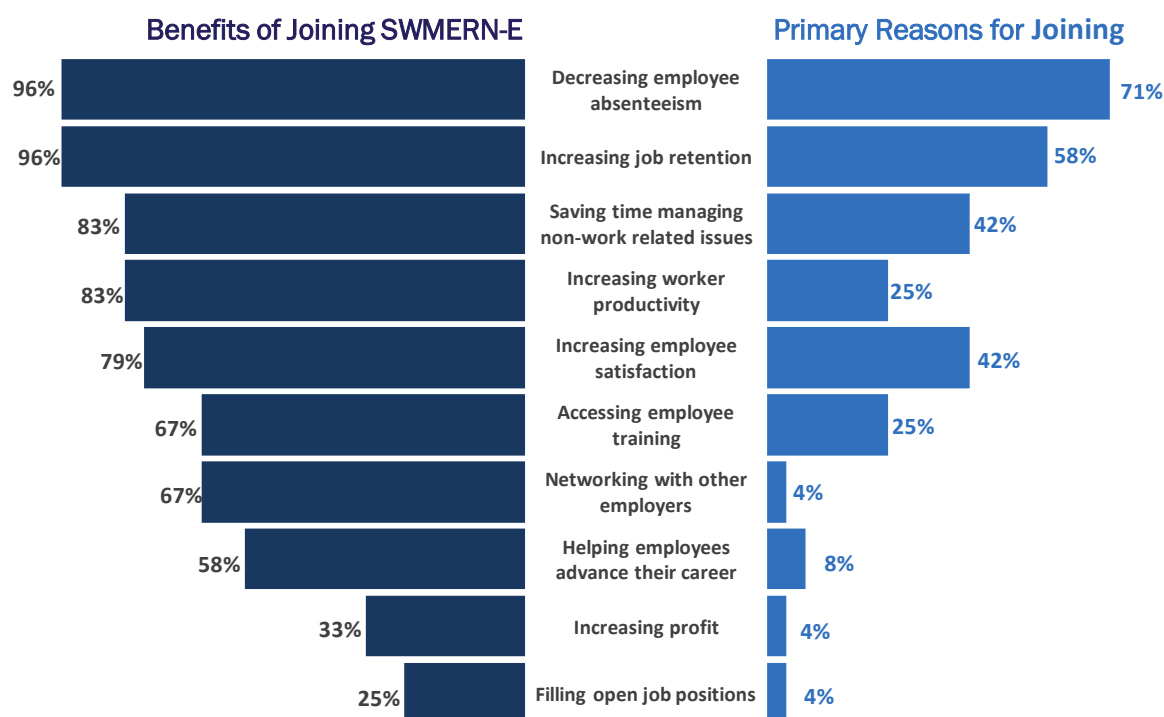
---

<sup>22</sup> Employers purchase shares of a success coach's time. The minimum share is for a four-hour block of time that the success coach spends at the employer site(s) assisting workers in addressing employment barriers.

<sup>23</sup> SPR conducted a baseline visit to existing members of the original SWMERN, but these employers were not involved in the SWMERN-E employer survey since they were part of the network prior to the WIF grant.

This survey asked employers about the reasons they joined the SWMERN-E, as well as the benefits they expected to receive from membership. As shown in Exhibit IV-3, the top two reasons cited by survey respondents for joining were *decreasing employee absenteeism* (71 percent) and *increasing employee retention* (58 percent); these two reasons were also the most frequently cited expected benefits of joining (96 percent each).

**Exhibit IV-3: Employers' Reasons for Joining and Perceived Benefits of SWMERN-E**  
n = 24



Source: SWMERN-E Employer Baseline Survey, 2016-2018

More than two out of five employer respondents (42 percent each) stated that *increasing employee satisfaction* and *saving time in managing employees' non-work-related issues* were also reasons for joining the SWMERN-E; both of these were also frequently cited as expected benefits of ERN membership. Only 25 percent of employer respondents said being able to *access employee training funds* motivated them to join the SWMERN-E, which is important to note, given that this service component is not part of the original ERN model but was an added resource made available through WIF grant funding. Given that this service was heavily marketed to members, expectations were that this service would have motivated new employers to join the ERN.

## ***SWMERN-E Enrollment Levels***

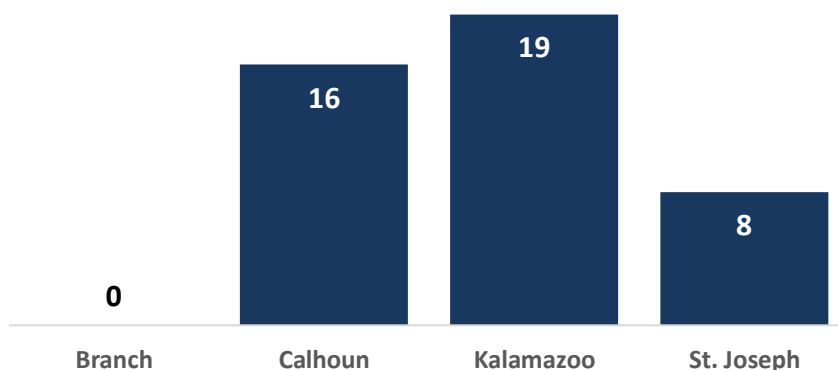
To understand how many employers enrolled in the ERN, the study team collected information from Upjohn's US DOL quarterly progress reports and interviews with key program staff over four rounds of site visits. As previously noted, at the inception of the WIF project (in October 2014), the SWMERN had 10 members in Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties. (Appendix E contains a list of the SWMERN-E employers by date joined, new or existing, and their counties of operation.) When the WIF grant

closed on October 31, 2018, the SWMERN-E had expanded to a total of 39 members (existing and new) across three counties—Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph. These 29 new business members translated into a 67 percent membership increase<sup>24</sup> and meant that the WIF project achieved 116 percent of its goal to add 25 new members. New businesses joined in both original counties—Calhoun and Kalamazoo—and in one of the new counties targeted by the grant expansion, St. Joseph. The SWMERN-E was unable to add any new businesses in Branch County during the grant’s period of performance, due to challenges discussed later in this chapter.

### **SWMERN-E Members by County**

As depicted in Exhibit IV-4, ERN membership was highest in Kalamazoo County.<sup>25</sup> During the life of the WIF grant, 19 ERN members were recruited from Kalamazoo County, compared to 16 members from Calhoun County and 8 members from St. Joseph County. While outreach and recruitment efforts targeted employers in the two new counties—Branch and St. Joseph—most employers represented in the SWMERN-E came from the two largest counties with the most business establishments, Calhoun and Kalamazoo. Actual membership growth in St. Joseph County was significant, however, with this county’s membership growing from zero members at the start of the grant to eight members. The growth in St. Joseph County took place in the later years of grant implementation, when BST professionals and the lead success coach made a concerted effort to enroll more employers from this county.

**Exhibit IV-4: Total SWMERN-E Members by County  
October 1, 2014–October 31, 2018**



Source: Upjohn US DOL quarterly progress reports; West Michigan TEAM and success coach interviews.

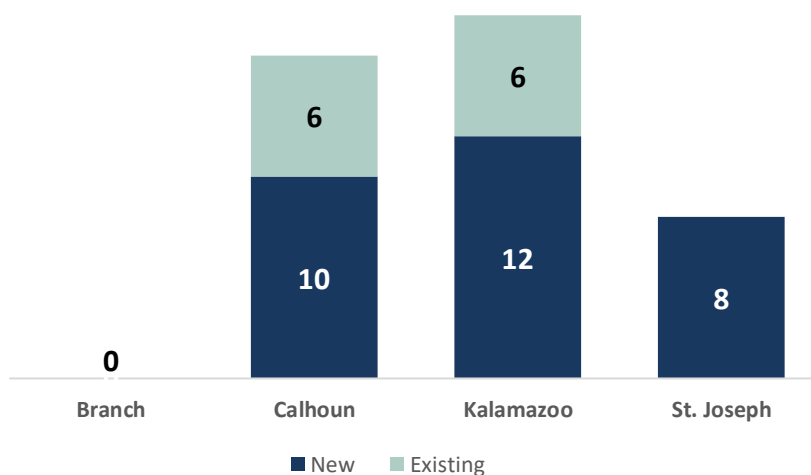
Note: Four SWMERN-E members operated in multiple counties attending meetings held across counties; these employers are counted in both the Calhoun and Kalamazoo County counts in the graphic.

<sup>24</sup> “Existing member” refers to an employer who signed an agreement to join the SWMERN prior to October 1, 2014. A “new member” represents an employer that signed an agreement to join the SWMERN-E between October 1, 2014 and October 31, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Several ERN members have multiple locations where success coaches provide services. So, for four SWMERN-E members—Summit Polymers, Bickford Senior Living, Employment Group, and Specialized Staffing—two county locations were included in the analysis. See Appendix E for a breakout of SWMERN-E members by county location(s).

Exhibit IV-5 shows the share of new members versus existing members by county. Kalamazoo added the greatest number of employers, with 12 new members, and Calhoun and St. Joseph Counties added eight new employers each.

**Exhibit IV-5: New and Existing SWMERN Members by County  
October 1, 2014–October 31, 2018**



Source: Upjohn US DOL quarterly progress reports; West Michigan TEAM and success coach interviews.

Note: Four SWMERN-E members (two new and two existing) operated in multiple counties attending meetings held across counties; these employers are counted in both the Calhoun and Kalamazoo County counts in the graphic.

It is worth noting that while no new employers were added in Branch County, there was a significant amount of recruitment activity that took place in this county. SWMERN-E administrative staff anticipated that several new employers would join the SWMERN-E during the implementation period, but due to unforeseen challenges no new employers were added. For example, one Branch County employer planned to join during the implementation period, but the HR management team changed and the SWMERN-E administrative team had to start over in their recruitment efforts with a new management team at the firm. In follow-up discussions held in 2019 with the WIF program manager and Upjohn staff, several Branch County firms joined the SWMERN in the summer 2019 although after the WIF implementation period.

#### **SWMERN-E Member Enrollment by Calendar Year**

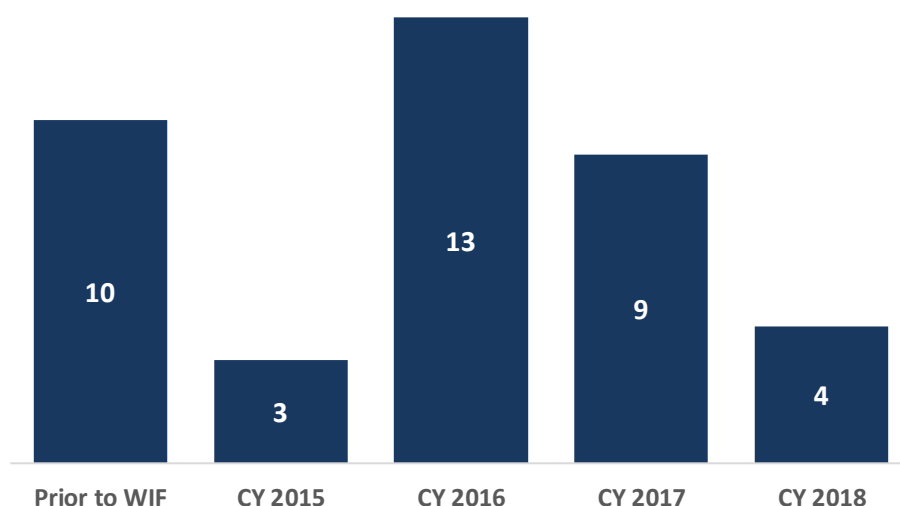
As shown in Exhibit IV-6, growth in SWMERN-E membership accelerated throughout the WIF grant period of performance. Measurement growth was compared to the baseline calendar year (CY) 2014, when there were 10 members. The slowest growth occurred in CY 2015, when three employers were added. (This was the start-up year for the grant, when a grant manager was designated and coordination meetings with West Michigan TEAM occurred.)

The highest-growth year was CY 2016, when 13 employers were added and West Michigan TEAM and the WIF program manager introduced a new position, the lead success coach. The lead success coach worked alongside West Michigan TEAM to market the ERN to employers and served as a liaison between MWSW and various business and community-based networks in Southwest Michigan

to provide information about the model. This led to many employer leads being identified and shared with West Michigan TEAM and the WIF program manager, which in turn resulted in increased participation rates in CY 2016 and CY 2017.

Less employer recruitment occurred in CY 2018, which resulted in four new members being added to the SWMERN-E. This was the final year of WIF grant implementation, and staff members spent much of their time on other components of the grant, including occupational skills training for jobseekers and incumbent workers and career pathways training for success coaches and ERN members.

#### Exhibit IV-6: SWMERN-E Membership Growth by Calendar Year

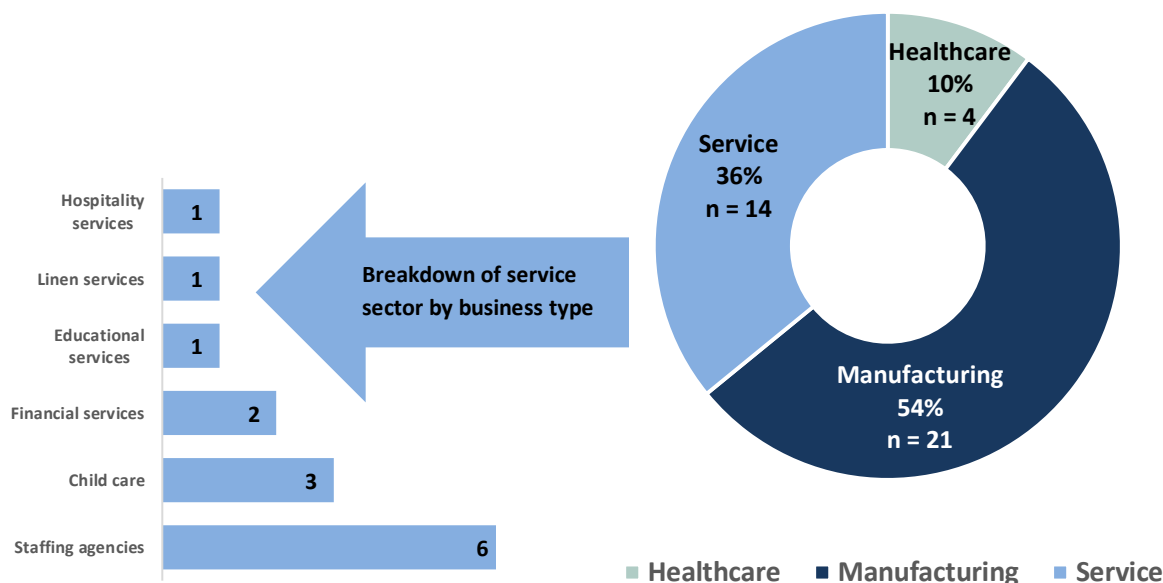


Source: Upjohn US DOL quarterly progress reports; West Michigan TEAM and success coach interviews.

#### SWMERN-E Members by Industry Focus and Workforce Size

The businesses participating in the SMWERN-E varied in terms of industry and size (see Appendix F). Using data reported by employers on the survey and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to document SWMERN members' primary industries, the study team found that 54 percent of members represented manufacturing (primarily supply materials and parts to the automotive industry), compared to 36 percent from service sectors, and 10 percent from healthcare (see Exhibit IV-7). The service sector had quite a bit of variation within it. As shown in Exhibit IV-7, six members represented staffing agencies, three represented childcare, two represented financial services, and one each represented educational services, linen, and hospitality services.

### Exhibit IV-7: Industry Focus of Existing and New SWMERN-E Members (n = 39)

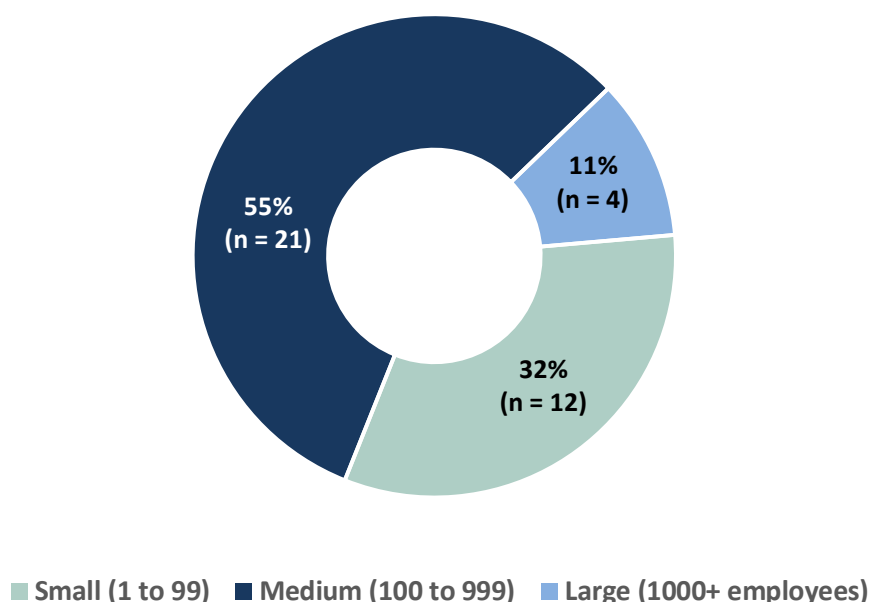


Source: Upjohn project manager and success coach interviews.

The sectoral diversity in SWMERN-E membership illustrated by the survey data speaks to a priority cited in the employer focus groups and the interviews conducted with grant-funded staff. In both, participants noted that sectoral diversity was needed to help mitigate member turnover that could result from economic changes within industry sectors. Also, these same respondents felt that having a diverse group of members helped to bring different viewpoints to discussions held across the three ERN affiliate meetings. Interview respondents indicated that they found the perspectives of HR representatives from different sectors to be mutually beneficial. In addition, they felt this diversity could be advantageous over a business cycle because it is possible that manufacturing firms may expand (and thus need retention, training, and recruitment help) during an expansionary part of the business cycle, whereas healthcare firms and service sector firms may remain more stable during the remainder of the cycle.

In terms of membership size by company, Exhibit IV-8 shows that 87 percent of SWMERN firms represented small (55 percent) and medium-sized (32 percent) businesses. These data suggest that, consistent with the outreach priorities described earlier in the chapter, the ERN model was particularly attractive to small and mid-sized firms that could pool their resources to fund success coaching services.

**Exhibit IV-8: Company Size of Existing and New SWMERN Members<sup>26</sup>**  
(n = 38)



### **SWMERN-E Member Retention**

While total ERN membership increased over the grant’s period of performance, both existing and new members left during that period. Ten members left the SWMERN-E between October 1, 2015 and September 30, 2018; these were mainly new members added during the grant period. This represents a total SWMERN-E member retention rate of 74 percent (i.e., 39 new and existing members, minus 10 who left, divided by the total number of new and existing members). Upjohn barely missed its grant goal of an 89 percent retention rate for new SWMERN-E members; it had an actual level of 83 percent new employer retention (i.e., 29 new members minus five who left during the grant period, divided by the total number of new members). Appendix E contains a list of employers who left the SWMERN-E during the grant period (October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2018).

Of the 10 firms (new and existing) that left during the grant period, five existing members were private employment agencies and one was a large manufacturing employer with headquarters overseas. The employment agencies did not provide permanent full-time employment to jobseekers, nor were they necessarily committed to the ERN model. Rather, several of these employment services agencies were “required” to join the network as part of their service contract with a local business, which was a member.

---

<sup>26</sup> For analysis purposes, SPR defined small businesses as having between one and 99 employees, medium as 100 to 999, and large as 1000+ employees. The number of employees was self-reported by employers to SWMERN-E success coaches. One employer did not report their company size and is missing from the analysis.

For example, a local manufacturing auto parts company required three employment agencies to join the original SWMERN as part of their service contracts with the company. Most of the employment agencies focused on meeting the temporary employment needs of a local business, whereas SWMERN-E members were focused on creating services that advanced their workforce by investing in skills development and retention. In fact, many SWMERN-E members felt that the employment agencies were leveraging the ERN to target their services to other SWMERN-E members. As a result, they did not feel comfortable discussing business-related matters in front of the employment agency personnel during their meetings. Therefore, a strategic decision was made to allow the employment agencies to remain in the network until their agreements expired, with the last agreement ending on June 30, 2017.

The primary reason cited by West Michigan TEAM and success coaches for attrition of the remaining five members was the loss of incentive funds to offset membership costs. According to West Michigan TEAM, some attrition is to be expected across ERNs operating in the United States. Therefore, it is important to recruit businesses that are committed to improving employee retention by paying a living wage and that embrace the importance of supporting wraparound services as part of their business model.

## Challenges Recruiting New Businesses Under the Expansion

The main challenges grant-funded staff encountered in the expansion were related to recruiting employers in the two new counties—in particular, Branch County. While the grant staff were relatively successful in launching an ERN in St. Joseph County during the grant period, they were unable to achieve the same results in Branch County, even with a concerted effort among West Michigan TEAM and grant staff to do so. Grant staff attributed their difficulties to several factors:

- **Branch County has a very small employer base that was reluctant to engage with a new concept.** Staff reported conducting numerous information sessions to Branch employers during the WIF grant, but felt employers had a distrust of the model because it was being presented by “outsiders” (i.e., not from the local community). Multiple grant staff reported a general distrust among Branch employers and community members of ideas and programs that came from the outside; there was a perception of an “us” versus “them” that nudged the community towards status quo. To counteract this, West Michigan TEAM and the lead success coach worked through a local foundation with roots in the community to identify an employer champion that could help generate support for establishing an ERN in Branch County. The WIF program manager anticipated a base of two to three employers in order to launch an ERN by summer 2019.
- **Employers in counties targeted for expansion were not as well connected to their public workforce systems as those in existing counties.** Grant staff reported that employers in Branch and St. Joseph Counties were not as well connected with one another or with the public workforce system. Another factor inhibiting employer recruitment in Branch County was the negative feelings that resulted from a major reorganization of the workforce development system in the local area in 2012. It emerged during the evaluation that, under the WIA, the local service delivery area was actually two separate local areas—Michigan Works! Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties, and Michigan Works! Barry, Branch, and

Calhoun Counties—that were administered by separate fiscal agents. The local area designations and fiscal agents changed in 2012 when the governor consolidated local areas and created a new four-county local area comprising Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties, called Michigan Works! Southwest; Barry moved to Michigan Works! West. As a result of the administrative and fiscal agent change, employers in Branch County perceived that they had been taken over by the “big cities” of Battle Creek and Kalamazoo.

- **New counties targeted for expansion were located further away from the activities and partners of the network.** Location was cited by grant staff as affecting employer recruitment in Branch and St. Joseph Counties. Many employers did not want to travel the distance to participate in SWMERN-E meetings held in Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties. (It is a 45-minute drive from Branch County to Calhoun County, and a 90-minute drive from St. Joseph to Kalamazoo County.) Grant staff also stated that there were not as many government or partner programs geographically housed in St. Joseph and Branch counties; rather, service provider staff traveled in from the other two counties to provide services to residents and employers. This was further exacerbated by the feeling in the business community in Branch and Calhoun Counties that what works in the “big cities” of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek does not necessarily work in rural communities; this contributed to their resistance to adopt the ERN model.

Overall, the SWMERN-E project made significant investments to increase participation in the existing counties—Calhoun and Kalamazoo—and also in Branch and St. Joseph. The SWMERN grew from 10 existing employers to a high of 39 firms, which demonstrates the ability of the grantee and its partners to increase the network. While there was some attrition, success coaches and Upjohn staff continued to coordinate outreach events and engage with employers to build the network. The SWMERN-E grant staff and West Michigan TEAM utilized their wide networks with employer organizations and community partners to help build a strong network that could market the model to their employer bases. Coordination with the public workforce system through MWSW BST professionals led to increased opportunities to market the ERN model to local businesses and to leverage workforce development resources to expand it in Southwest Michigan. The SWMERN-E project benefited from the resources available to Upjohn as the administrative arm for WIOA and Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope. (PATH) programs, Michigan’s employment and training program for welfare recipients, in the local area.

## V. Efforts to Engage SWMERN-E Members in Developing Career Pathways

This chapter describes the efforts undertaken during the grant period to build the capacity of the grant's administrative team and MWSW BST staff to engage with members in developing pathways for entry-level careers in identified industries and for internal, member-specific careers. As will be discussed, this was one of the last areas of the WIF grant implemented, and the administrative team and BST staff reported only modest achievements in this area.

### Key Findings

- **Despite efforts to educate employers on the benefits of creating career pathways, most employers did not undertake this work during the grant period.** The administrative team used SWMERN-E member meetings to provide general information about career pathways and held in-depth training sessions for members interested in building career pathways for their respective companies. These events provided the grant's administrative team with opportunities to build a common language around career pathways and a knowledge base that employers could then use to pursue related discussions with their success coaches. While the seed was planted, not many SWMERN-E members were ready to undertake this endeavor during the grant's period of performance.
- **Employers must invest significant time and resources to develop career pathways within their organizations.** Most SWMERN-E firms had multiple career pathways that could be developed, but identifying the required knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential for success on the job is time consuming. It was therefore important to build in key metrics to assess the impact career pathways had on employee retention and job satisfaction in order to help employers evaluate the benefits of investing in their development. Work with SWMERN-E members to identify these key metrics had not yet been initiated at the close of the grant period.
- **SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff reported improved understandings of and capacity for advocating for the career pathway approach.** Both used the professional development they received to work one-on-one with jobseekers and incumbent workers in developing career pathway plans.
- **Career pathway development was mainly initiated at the employee-level versus the firm-level under the WIF grant.** At the employee level, success coaches and MWSW BST staff helped employees focus on career planning by looking at advancement opportunities within SWMERN-E member firms. At the firm level, only a few employers mapped out career pathways available within their own organizations that could be used to support human capital development efforts, such as OJTs and pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs leading to career growth.

## **A Case for Career Pathway Development Within Firms**

Many of the employers in the SWMERN-E were from the manufacturing and service sectors, which employ many low-wage, hourly workers. Based on focus groups conducted with SWMERN-E members, these types of workers often make job changes for relatively modest wage gains, and employers focused their efforts on ways to address significant turnover at the frontline level. Only a few SWMERN-E members—spanning a variety of industries and company sizes—decided to invest in career pathway development to improve employee retention. This is a developing area within the SWMERN-E, as many companies are just starting to focus their efforts on identifying career paths and the training efforts needed to help workers progress.

The WIF program manager stated that only two SWMERN-E members reported having internal pathways prior to the start of the grant. Members of the administrative team often used these employers as resources and solicited their advice in engaging other SWMERN-E members. The companies that undertook internal career pathway development came from a variety of backgrounds—healthcare, service, and manufacturing—and varied in size from medium to large employers. Under the WIF grant, member firms interested in making employee development and pathways a priority were given education, training, and tools to help them do so, as described in the next section.

## **SWMERN-E Efforts to Build Entry-Level Pathways for Specific Occupations and Industries**

In its original grant submission to US DOL, Upjohn outlined a plan to work collaboratively with SWMERN-E members to create entry-level career pathways for specific occupations and industries that were relevant to the local labor market in Southwest Michigan. Members of the administrative team, particularly the WIF program manager and success coaches, anticipated working alongside member firms to identify entry-level positions that were in demand and to map out the knowledge, skills, and abilities (referred to within the initiative as KSAs) needed by jobseekers to enter employment. They would then map these entry-level positions to specific occupations represented by their local employers.

After the administrative team approached their WIF advisory board—comprising several SWMERN-E members, West Michigan TEAM, success coaches and MWSW staff—it was determined that much of this work had already been undertaken by other entities, such as US DOL and its Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education, local community colleges, the local public workforce system, and training providers. Thus, administrative team members and partners invested in the SWMERN-E saw a greater need to focus on increasing employers' understanding of career pathways as a retention and succession planning tool and on working alongside employers to develop *company-specific* (or at least *worker-specific*) career paths that workers could use to improve their career potential.

## **SWMERN-E Efforts to Assist Members in Building Internal Career Pathways**

Engaging with member firms in building career pathways was a goal of the expansion envisioned under the WIF grant. However, it was one of the last endeavors undertaken by the administrative team because it was primarily focused on expanding the ERN model into two new counties and increasing the number of members in the network. According to the grant agreement, Upjohn expected West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches to work with employer members to create formal career pathway structures representing the different industries in the SWMERN-E, mainly advanced manufacturing and healthcare. The administrative team quickly learned that this goal was

“Our goal was to expose all of the employers to [career pathways] and provide information to keep the conversation going.”

**WIF Program Manager**

unachievable, however, as most members were not yet ready to undergo career pathway development, primarily for reasons related to time and staffing investments. Thus, WIF funds were mainly used to build the capacity of administrative team members and success coaches to educate employers and assist a few member firms in developing career pathways that would facilitate employee advancement. These efforts fell into three areas: (1) building the capacity of success coaches and public

workforce system staff to support career pathway development with employer members; (2) educating member firms about career pathway development; and (3) working with incumbent workers to map individual career paths. Each of these areas is addressed in greater detail below.

### ***Building Capacity to Support Career Pathways Development***

Educating and building the capacity of SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff about career pathways was a first step in developing them. Success coaches and MWSW BST staff were educated about the core components of career pathways and how to help businesses understand the value of identifying and clearly communicating what career advancement opportunities existed in their workplaces and what worksite training, internships, financial support, apprenticeships, and other opportunities existed for jobseekers and incumbent workers. During FY 2017, there were four training events focused on how best to assist employers with structuring and implementing career pathways. Exhibit V-1 below provides a brief description of these events, which ranged from informational to in-depth training opportunities. Most occurred in the latter half of the grant period, which may have contributed to the slow uptake in developing internal career pathways among SWMERN-E members.

### Exhibit V-1: Career Pathways Capacity-Building Events for Success Coaches and MWSW BST Staff

| No. | Date and Training Provider                                                                                                                                        | Training Group                     | Training Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  |  <b>October 17, 2017</b><br><i>Maier and Maier &amp; Jobs for the Future</i>     | Success coaches and MWSW BST staff | Two-hour webinar to introduce concept of career pathway development to SWMERN-E staff and partners.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2.  |  <b>November 20, 2017</b><br><i>Jobs for the Future</i>                          | Success coaches and MWSW BST staff | Two-hour discussion with technical assistance provider to help better understand the needs of local employers, success coaches, and MWSW BST representatives.                                                                                                                                        |
| 3.  |  <b>December 12, 2017</b><br><i>Jobs for the Future</i>                          | Success coaches and MWSW BST staff | Two-hour webinar on using career pathways within the healthcare industry, focused on using career pathway terminology and design elements with local businesses.                                                                                                                                     |
| 4.  |  <b>WOF</b><br><b>November 13 - December 15, 2017</b><br><i>Maier and Maier</i> | WIF program manager                | Online, self-paced training course lasting five weeks (approximately eight hours total), <i>Leading Change While Implementing Innovations</i> , attended by WIF program manager to encourage and strengthen leadership and change management skills at SWMERN-E member firms and with program staff. |

Source: WIF program manager and success coach interviews.

The US DOL national technical assistance provider for the WIF grantees, Maier and Maier, assisted Upjohn in identifying a subject-matter expert to assist in training staff and engaging SWMERN-E members. The grant administrator asked Jobs for the Future, a national expert on career pathway development, to conduct two webinars: an initial webinar introducing administrative team members to core concepts related to career pathways (Exhibit V-1, row 1), and a follow-up webinar on how to initiate and engage in conversations with businesses, economic development entities, and community organizations about career pathway development and usage (Exhibit V-1, row 2). The goals of these training events were (1) to ensure that individuals who commonly engage with the business community, including SWMERN-E firms, had the information needed to hold discussions on career pathway development with employers, and (2) to assist employers in implementing the process. These two events led to a final two-hour webinar where Jobs for the Future staff modeled how success coach and BST staff could use career pathway design elements to assist healthcare providers in building internal career pathways for their respective firms and available occupations (see Exhibit V-1, row 3). Success coaches and MWSW BST staff reported that the training provided

them with a better understanding of how they could engage with the business community and help firms understand the benefits of implementing a career coaching model.

Administrative team members reported three reasons that they needed additional time to fully engage with the content and develop a strategy for how they could use it to market services and programs for SWMERN-E members and other local businesses. First, the information in the trainings came late in the grant cycle. As the BST manager stated, “I wish we had more time with [the content], because I think it’s just on the cusp of being something great, and I think it could be great.” It was not possible, however, to integrate it fully during the limited remaining implementation period. Second, while the team was already engaged with local businesses, it needed more time to develop relationships and share information with relevant community partners, like chambers of commerce and economic development. This would have allowed more employers to learn about the benefits of growing their own talent from within as part of a career pathway development process. Finally, for the career pathway component to be successful in their labor market, employers themselves needed more time to advance the model internally. The WIF program manager explained that developing company-specific career pathways is not a simple process, and the grant administrative team needed to work to keep employers on track. Upjohn itself experienced this phenomenon when, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the process and the level of effort required to develop internal career pathways, the organization went through its own career pathway mapping process.

The *Leading Change While Implementing Innovation* course was offered by the US DOL National Technical Assistance provider via an online, self-paced training platform (see Exhibit V-1, row 4). This training was just for WIF grantees in response to their expressed interest in strengthening their change management leadership skills and building internal organizational capacity for change. While the session was five weeks in length, the content only required a 1- to 1.5-hour weekly time commitment, which over the five-week period was a total eight hours. This made it accessible to leaders and staff who had other job commitments to meet.

### **Educating SWMERN-E Members about Career Pathways Development**

Members of the grant’s administrative team devoted part of each ERN meeting to discussing career pathways and gauging the level of interest among SWMERN-E members in developing internal career pathways. Based on these discussions, they identified three members that had already begun career pathways work at their firms. Members of the grant’s administrative team studied their experiences and explored opportunities to share them with the larger SWMERN-E membership. The WIF program manager, success coaches, and MWSW BST professionals collected a set of best business practices—including information about database management, record keeping, train-the-trainer and coaching models, and creating a culture of career engagement—that will be used in the future to engage more businesses in career pathway exploration and development.

To assist members in exploring career pathway development, Upjohn and the SWMERN-E success coaches hosted two training events during the grant cycle for member firms, listed in Exhibit V-2. Both sessions were led by a subject-matter expert, Bill Guest, from the National Career Pathways Technical Assistance Center. Mr. Guest used the *Career Navigation System Guidebook*, which is a

step-by-step guide for practitioners that defines specific components of demand-driven competency-based career pathways.<sup>27</sup>

### Exhibit V-2: Career Pathways Events for SWMERN-E Members

| <u>Date and Training Provider</u>                                                                                                                                                     | <u>Training Group</u>                                                             | <u>Training Description</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <b>December 18, 2017</b><br><i>Bill Guest, National Career Pathways Technical Assistance Center</i> | 20 staff from a large healthcare provider, success coaches, and 12 MWSW BST staff | Eight-hour training event focused on introducing career pathway development to large healthcare SWMERN-E member.                                                                                                                                                |
|  <b>April 17, 2018</b><br><i>Bill Guest, National Career Pathways Technical Assistance Center</i>    | Nine SWMERN-E members, four success coaches, and several MWSW BST staff           | Four-hour session that provided SWMERN-E members with detailed information about career pathway development. Large healthcare SWMERN-E firm (focus of the previous training session) shared their career pathway development experiences with the larger group. |

Source: WIF program manager and success coach interviews.

The first of the two sessions was directed at a large SWMERN-E member company from the healthcare sector, based on its previous investment in internal training and a desire to take advantage of technical assistance available through its SWMERN-E membership. (While several of the healthcare entities in the network were invited to the event, only one attended.) As stated earlier, this firm is a leader in the local community and works to create a culture of innovation. To help decrease voluntary turnover, the company was focused on retention strategies, such as competitive pay and employee benefits, a healthy work environment, career development, and work-life balance. After this meeting, the healthcare provider began engaging with executives, staff, and other management personnel about career pathways. The employer made a decision to focus on non-technical career pathways, such as culinary, housekeeping, and maintenance, to show how an individual who has a “customer service focus” and likes working with patients could, through short-term occupational skills training, transition into other careers.

The second session was broader and was attended by nine employers representing from a wider array of industries. Following a monthly SWMERN-E meeting, all members were invited to hear lessons learned from the efforts of the large healthcare provider described above. Two of the nine employers represented at this meeting were already undertaking career pathway development in their own organizations. These SWMERN-E members served as resources and points of contact for other members interested in learning about the process.

<sup>27</sup> Guest, J., Bennett, S., & Guest, B. (2017, August). *Career navigation system guidebook*. Waco, TX: National Career Pathways Technical Assistance Center.

## Services Offered to Jobseekers and SWMERN-E Incumbent Workers

As a result of the training on career pathway development they received, success coaches and MWSW BST staff felt better prepared to assist jobseekers and incumbent workers in assessing their current knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) and identifying career-path options. To help address open positions with employers, MWSW BST staff provided training to unemployed jobseekers interested in pursuing training in demand occupations identified by SWMERN-E members. Completing this training did not guarantee the individual a job with the SWMERN-E member, but it made it more likely that the individual had the requisite entry-level skills required for employment. Success coaches also reported working directly with incumbent workers at member firms to build their skills, obtain wage increases and, in some cases, transition to more highly-skilled occupations at their company. (The training services provided under the WIF grant are described in greater detail in Chapters VI and VII on incumbent worker services and jobseeker services.)

In a few instances, success coaches reported working collaboratively with HR staff and managers to help incumbent workers understand how they could progress into higher-skilled jobs with additional training and education. HR departments and managers were able to identify workers with career growth potential to either receive training from the employer or be referred to their success coach to develop a career path plan and possibly receive OJT or occupational skills training funded by the public workforce system. Where possible, success coaches helped to link these workers to existing workforce development funds available for incumbent worker training—such as the state’s Going PRO initiative—or with WIF-funded training opportunities (e.g., management and supervisory training and OJT).

Success coaches used two steps to engage with SWMERN-E members’ incumbent workers around career pathways:

1. **Self-assessment.** Success coaches met with employees to discuss their KSAs, past experiences, and current and future interests.
2. **Individualized career map.** Based on these conversations, success coaches used their Goal4It!® training—a comprehensive short- and long-term planning and goal-setting tool—to help employees develop career maps to identify other positions within their organizations that aligned with their interests. In some cases, these positions represented lateral moves into different job families; in others they were promotions to higher-skilled jobs.

## Challenges

The administrative team faced several challenges implementing the career pathway development component of the WIF grant:

- **Success coaches and MWSW BST team staff lacked expertise to engage SWMERN-E members in career pathway development.** At the outset of the grant, the WIF program manager realized that to successfully engage SWMERN-E members in internal career pathway development, members of the administrative team would need specialized training. This led Upjohn and the WIF program manager to solicit input from the national technical assistance provider to identify an organization with the expertise to train success coaches and MWSW BST professionals on career pathways.

- **It took time for the administrative team staff to coordinate with the national WIF technical assistance provider to identify a subject-matter expert and negotiate a contract to offer training to MWSW BST professionals and success coaches.** This led to significant delays in working with SWMERN-E members to develop internal career pathways. The length of the process affected timely rollout of this grant component.
- **Most SWMERN-E members were not yet ready to embark on internal career pathway development during the grant period.** While Upjohn and the success coaches actively worked to introduce career pathway development to SWMERN-E businesses at quarterly meetings, only a few decided that they were ready to undertake the work required. Success coaches were confident that by introducing this content, more SWMERN-E members would develop internal career pathways as a retention strategy in the future.

While most SWMERN-E members could benefit from increased efforts to establish clear strategies for growing talent from within, relatively few undertook the opportunities afforded by the WIF grant to begin the process of developing career pathways. This was partly because MWSW BST staff and SWMERN-E success coaches needed to increase their awareness and understanding of career pathways in order to market their potential to member firms. As reported by members of the administrative team and success coaches, many members had a desire to grow their own talent and build career pathways, but they did not have the resources or time needed to invest in the process. Several SWMERN-E members expressed an interest in developing pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs to build advancement opportunities and career pathways within their companies. As such, Upjohn and MWSW BST staff are working closely with these employers to assist with developing state and/or registered apprenticeship programs.

## VI. Incumbent Worker Services

---

Throughout the grant period, employees of SWMERN-E member companies had access to a variety of services, including onsite success coaching and short-term occupational skills training, both classroom-based and OJT. In addition, the grant funded several professional development activities designed to build the capacity of success coaches to provide effective advancement-oriented services to employees of member companies. Drawing on data from site visits, incumbent worker surveys, and information about trainings provided by the WIF-funded training coordinator, this chapter describes strategies used to market services to incumbent workers, services offered to and accessed by incumbent workers, and their satisfaction with those services.

### Key Findings

- **Providing professional development to success coaches and creating new specialized assignments among them yielded a stronger, more effective success coach team to serve incumbent workers.** The success coach team grew from two to five staff members over the project period. A lead success coach was appointed to supervise and coordinate them, and a resource navigator was appointed to focus on helping the whole team access more community resources. In addition, coaches attended several proprietary professional development trainings designed to expand and deepen their coaching skills.
- **Success coaches maintained high levels of communication with employer members and, in some cases, helped influence their culture.** Both parties agreed that strong communication was key to employees' successful utilization of services at their sites. Success coaches also advocated for employers to increase wage rates, develop internal career pathways, and in general become more "employee-centered" in their company cultures. In some cases, these efforts resulted in changes such as wage increases. At some companies, success coaches struggled with low utilization; at times, HR departments appeared too busy to help troubleshoot and increase employee use of success coach services.
- **New incumbent worker training services under the grant were highly valued by SWMERN-E members.** The WIF grant funded classroom-based, short-term training in leadership, supervisory, and occupational skills, as well as career-pathway-focused OJT. These OJT opportunities helped incumbent workers increase their skill level and/or specialization, which led to pay increases and promotions for many. SWMERN-E employer members valued the opportunity to work with the WIF-funded training coordinator, brought onto the team during the latter half of the grant, who specialized in guiding them through the training and OJT contracts as well as the reimbursement processes. Without this dedicated position, it is unlikely that so many employers would have taken up incumbent worker training during the grant period. While the administrative team members were proud of how many people they trained, they felt they could have trained more.

## Success Coaching Operations, Communications, and Services

Success coaches' role in providing workplace stability supports to incumbent workers was essential to the original SWMERN model. Under the WIF grant, they worked collaboratively with executives, HR staff, supervisors, and managers to provide coaching and to educate workers about resources for helping them address employment barriers.

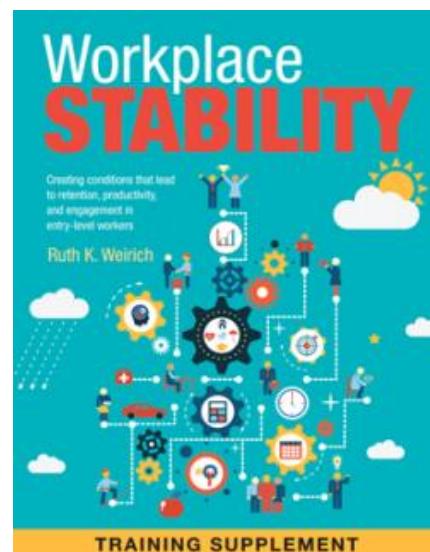
### Success Coaches' Roles and Responsibilities

During the grant period, five success coaches supported the network; each coach supported between eight and 10 employers. Although coaches did not carry "caseloads" the way other human service program employees often do, the lead success coach reported that, on average, each coach met with 20 to 30 employees per month and delivered 40 to 60 services to this set of employees during the grant period. Some organizational practices pre-dated the grant, such as weekly team meetings and frequent ad-hoc communication among the coaching team. The WIF-funded expansion allowed the SWMERN-E to improve the organization and oversight of the success coaches. As the number of coaches grew to meet the demands of the expanded network, West Michigan TEAM and the WIF program manager at Upjohn decided to appoint a lead success coach to supervise the other four coaches. Another success coach served as a resource navigator for part of the grant, helping connect success coaches to both community resources and partners; this better equipped the coaches to serve incumbent workers who sought their assistance.

Before the grant, success coaches as a group were split between being official employees of MDHHS and of Upjohn; over the course of the grant, the administrative team (West Michigan TEAM and Upjohn) decided to make the Upjohn the employer of record for all success coaches. This decision was made because the percentage of incumbent workers who needed public assistance (and who would be helped if their success coach was also an MDHHS employee) declined.

### Coach Training and Professional Development

Orientation for success coaches during the expansion was similar to how it was conducted prior to the grant, though some new elements were added. As success coaches were onboarded, they were typically asked to shadow one or more of the other coaches. In the latter half of the grant period, they undertook a variety of professional development trainings that added new capacities to their repertoire. For example, in 2017, success coaches were trained in a new methodology for addressing issues affecting job performance based on the book *Workplace Stability* by Ruth Weirich. Coaches also attended a multiday webinar-based training—conducted by the Ruby Payne Company and entitled *aha! Process*—usually meant to help HR personnel and managers understand the complexity of their workforce. The success coaches took the training in a train-the-trainer mode so it could be offered as a service to SWMERN-E member employers.



The *aha!* Process training provided success coaches with tools to improve employee retention and reduce employee turnover within member firms. The model and multiday training emphasized:

- Recognizing the range of factors that create instability for employees;
- Understanding the connection between instability, employee performance, and profitability;
- Identifying the most effective techniques and tactics for increasing workplace stability; and
- Creating an action plan best suited to business community members and their culture and employees.

In 2018, coaches received training in Goal4 It!®, a goal-setting model that involves a four-step process for setting and achieving goals that was co-created by Mathematica Policy Research and a team of academics and clinicians. The SWMERN-E success coaches were among a group of service providers pilot-testing the curriculum and using it with incumbent workers at member firms. The ERN model required some customization, due to the fact that the program was designed for a more intensive case manager–client relationship than SWMERN-E success coaches typically had with employees. As one coach said, “Instead of having a whole year...you’ll be lucky if you see them for a week.” That said, the coaches were content with the training and the tools they received. Several highlighted the fact that the model helps individuals not simply focus on the “here and now,” but on longer-term goals that will help them reach economic independence and have plans in place to help them mitigate issues that affect their job performance (e.g., back-up plans for sick children, alternative transportation).

## **Interfacing with Employers**

One of the most important aspects of a success coach’s job was the ability to build a strong relationship with the SWMERN-E company to which they were assigned; this emphasis was heightened under the WIF grant. While initial contact regarding joining the SWMERN-E was established by West Michigan TEAM and the WIF program manager at Upjohn, success coaches actively maintained ongoing communication with their host employers. This level of interaction allowed them to market their services (seen as key to retention of companies within the SWMERN-E), encourage employers to undertake career pathway development within their companies, and provide open job listings so that the SWMERN-E could help fill vacancies—one of the goals of the expansion.

Part of the vision of the expanded SWMERN-E was to help employer members—many of whom were struggling with high rates of turnover—fill vacancies and, for longer-term change, develop a more retention-oriented culture through expanded support for individuals struggling with personal issues. In interviews, coaches shared examples of their perceptions of company culture change during the grant period. Several coaches said SWMERN-E members had sought their advice about why turnover rates were so high within their companies. Depending on their comfort level and relationship with the company, coaches gave advice about possible reasons for staff turnover, such as low pay rates, lack of career mobility, and challenges in relationships between managers and line staff, and about potential ways to resolve those challenges, such as through wage increases, well-defined career pathways, and training in supervisorial communication. Success coaches felt their advice had some influence on companies around issues like wage rates, terminations for tardiness or absenteeism, and the amount of training available to new hires and incumbent employees.

For example, one coach reported working with a SWMERN-E member with a “three strikes” policy (i.e., any worker with three disciplinary actions was terminated). The success coach described

working with this company's HR and managerial staff to help them understand that situational issues, like sick children, lack of transportation, or other family issues, could be affecting workers, and that if referrals were made to the success coach after the first infraction, they might see a drop in terminations. As a result, a new process was implemented whereby managers and HR staff referred individuals facing a first or second "strike" to the success coach. While not all sought services, the ones who did received assistance with behavioral and workplace stability issues. Several workers referred to success coaches' established action plans to deal with unexpected childcare, transportation, or housing issues. These actions on the part of success coaches, both casual and involving specific policy changes, were part of a larger effort to support companies interested in growing a more retention-oriented company culture.

Almost all employer representatives interviewed over the course of the grant reported a high level of communication between the HR department and the success coaches. Several noted that success coaches expanded the capacity of HR departments by handling issues that their personnel were too busy or ill-equipped to deal with. Success coaches reported working successfully with HR contacts to increase the utilization rate for success coach services. For example, one requested that she be moved to a more visible location on the company premises to encourage better awareness among workers. Another requested and received permission to share information about services at weekly management meetings so that managers would become more comfortable referring their line staff. This level of engagement with employers was considered vital to the ERN model because member companies were asked to rejoin annually, and the decision to do so typically involved assessing the success coaches' value as a retention strategy to reduce the cost of high turnover and retraining. According to West Michigan TEAM, companies that were actively engaging with their success coaches showed a greater willingness to rejoin the network.

"The employers have not been shy about how much they love their success coach."

**Upjohn Staff Member**

Overall, member companies valued and engaged their success coaches. In a few cases, however, a lack of clear understanding or communication between the success coach and the primary contact in the HR department was reported to have had a negative effect on utilization rates. And, in general, success coaches often noted that, while at some companies they were always very busy, at others they wished more employees would take advantage of the services available.

As under the previous (pre-WIF grant) iteration of the SWMERN, success coaches tracked the services that they provided via Successforce, a customized version of Salesforce database. They created a profile for each person who came to see them that included basic contact and demographic information and the services provided. At SWMERN-E meetings, success coaches reviewed reports informed by data from Successforce about the number of people they served, the specific services provided, and the types of employees served (e.g., public assistance recipients). At these meetings, coaches also shared anonymous success stories of people they had helped that month. These stories were designed to help member companies to see beyond the numbers reported from the database and to get to understand the challenges affecting their workforce.

One issue pertaining to the availability of success coaching services was that of privacy and confidentiality. In some cases, employees were referred to success coaches by HR or a supervisor. In other cases, however, individuals sought out success coaches on their own. Coaches displayed

sensitivity about this matter. One coach acknowledged that while incumbent worker services were meant to be delivered anonymously, this could not always be accomplished. However, coaches attested (and interviewed employers concurred) that there was a shared interest in allowing individuals to seek the services they needed without interference. One coach said,

When I'm there, [HR] may send someone to come and see me or [an employee] might see me in the cafeteria, but [employers] generally respect [employee privacy]. I don't ever get prying questions from employers about what I'm doing with somebody in particular unless they have referred someone to me. [In that case,] the only thing I give them back is, I've reached out and we've connected.

In a survey of individuals who had received success coach services, a large majority (90 percent) indicated that they felt "comfortable" or "very comfortable" accessing services in their workplace.

## Success Coaching Services

As shown in Exhibit VI-1, there were six primary categories of success coaching services delivered to incumbent workers during the grant period.

**Exhibit VI-1: Primary Success Coaching Services Offered**

|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Childcare Assistance          |  Coaching                    |
|  Financial Assistance        |  Transportation Assistance |
|  Food and Housing Assistance |  Work-Related Training     |

Source: Success coach interview data and Successforce database.

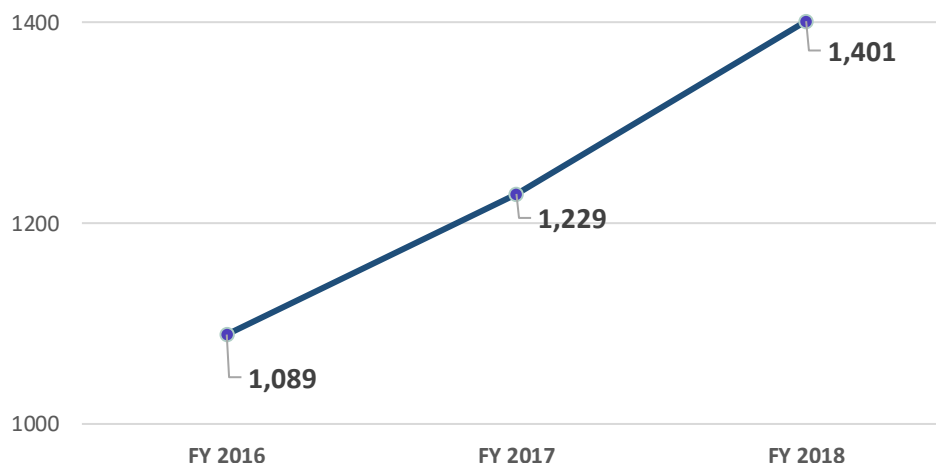
Over the course of the grant period, the most popular services provided, based on success coach tracking of services provided, were coaching; help with accessing government programs, including those offering food, housing, and transportation assistance; assistance with childcare; and financial assistance, including financial literacy.

There were some differences in the SWMERN-E services available to employees of member companies due to success coach areas of expertise and/or the availability of partner services to which the success coach could refer workers. During the grant period, SWMERN-E hired a bilingual success coach who offered customized English-language classes for Spanish speakers and basic Spanish instruction for monolingual English-speaking supervisors. These classes were typically offered at the job site in half-hour increments immediately before or after a shift change. Only one success coach was bilingual; thus, this service was unique and primarily available to those eight employers to whom the bilingual success coach was assigned. In the early implementation years, the employees of member companies in St. Joseph County did not yet have access to hardship loans, a popular service in the other two counties, because a local credit union partner willing to provide them had not been identified. However, in July 2018 a local bank agreed to offer hardship loans to

employees of St. Joseph County SWMERN-E members, which improved service delivery options to members' employees.

As depicted in Exhibit VI-2, the number of incumbent workers accessing success coach services in each fiscal year increased steadily over the grant period.

**Exhibit VI-2: Number of Incumbent Workers Accessing Success Coaching by Fiscal Year, 2016–2018**



*Source:* West Michigan TEAM Successforce year-end service reports (FY 2016–2018).

*Note:* Each annual total is a point-in-time measure of the number of employees who accessed coach services; annual tallies are not cumulative—that is, counts in one fiscal year could include the same individuals who received services in a prior year.

### **How Incumbent Workers Learned about Services**

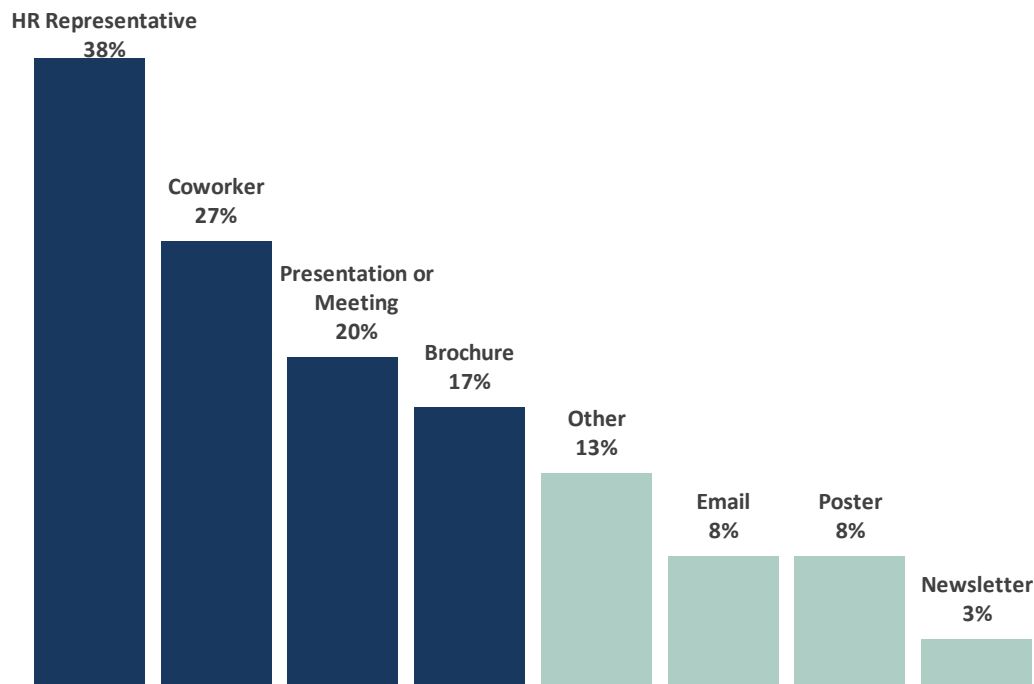
As noted, individuals were either referred to success coaches by the HR department or a supervisor, or they independently sought out success coaches. Coaches typically marketed their own services at member firms, putting out flyers, walking the floor, visiting company breakrooms, attending new employee orientations, and attending monthly employee meetings (often held by shift group). Some coaches said that they tried to be present during shift changes so that employees on all shifts (including those that began or ended before or after standard 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. business hours) had the opportunity to meet them and learn about available coaching services.

In general, the coaches said they were on good terms with HR representatives, who in numerous interviews over the course of the evaluation attested to seeing the coaches as additional resources for their incumbent workforce. Employers and success coaches alike noted that SWMERN-E members referred employees to success coach services for issues employers felt were out of the purview of HR staff. In several cases during disciplinary actions, employers offered employees the option of deferring termination if coaching services were incorporated into corrective action plans.

As shown in Exhibit VI-3 below, the most common way workers heard about success coach services during the grant period was through live interactions. This included from HR personnel (38 percent),

their coworkers (27 percent), and at presentations or meetings (20 percent). The “other” responses—accounting for 13 percent overall—also primarily represented live interactions, such as success coaches, benefits fairs, friends, and referrals from MWSW, MDHHS, community-based organizations and/or supervisors, as well as through the online portal. Less often, workers heard about the services through print and electronic transmissions—brochures (17 percent), posters (8 percent), email (8 percent), and newsletters (3 percent).

**Exhibit VI-3: Ways Incumbent Workers Learned about Success Coaching Services**



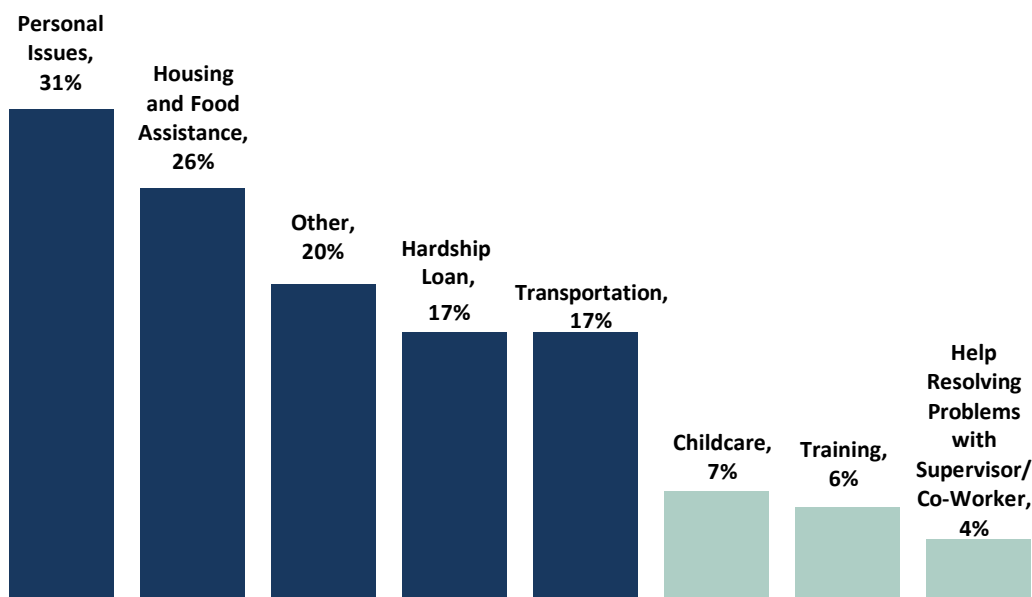
Source: Incumbent worker success coach baseline survey responses (n = 424).

Coaches typically collected some basic information about the employee (e.g., contact information, position, reason for seeking services) and responded to the primary issue the worker had come to them about. Beyond baseline data collection, coaches would typically talk with someone—either in person or by text or email, depending on how the individual had approached them—about their needs. In the process of doing that, and often using methods from their professional development trainings, they would probe for ways in which the specific need that prompted the individual to seek assistance might be connected to longer-term or more overarching issues. Coaches attested that the intensity of their services was driven by the degree to which the employee wanted to open up and work with the coach on these broader issues versus resolving one particular issue.

As shown in Exhibit VI-4, according to survey respondents who accessed success coach services, the most common reasons for seeking services were personal problems (31 percent), assistance with housing or food (26 percent), transportation assistance (17 percent), and “other” (20 percent), which included health insurance and affordable health care, education assistance, financial management and navigation, and interacting with the HR department. Coaches often found themselves also supporting employees’ soft skills development through coaching techniques or

referrals to professionalization or short-term occupational skills training funded by the WIF grant, described below.

**Exhibit VI-4: Reasons for Seeking Success Coach Services**



Source: Incumbent worker success coach baseline survey responses (n = 424).

Hardship loans were a special service made available to employees through success coaching, although they were not unique to the WIF-funded expansion. The SWMERN-E administrators coordinated with local credit unions and banks to offer hardship loans to workers. These loans were considered within the array of services available through success coaching because financial emergencies can impact worker productivity or their ability to get to work at all. The funds were designed to address a pressing need, such as for fixing a car the worker used to drive to work. Approximately 18 percent of survey respondents had received hardship loans. (As noted earlier, hardship loans were not available to employees in St. Joseph County until part way through the third year of the implementation period.)

A unique feature of the short-term hardship loan program was its focus on helping workers save money for future emergencies. Whether a worker who sought a loan had never had a savings account or simply struggled to save, accessing a loan through the SWMERN-E came with a requirement to save. The SWMERN-E hardship loan program required an employee receiving a loan to deposit a minimum amount (e.g., \$10 per pay period) into a savings account that did not allow withdrawals until the loan was paid in full. The savings commitment was added to the loan repayment amount to help support workers in managing limited income and saving for emergencies. At the end of the payment plan, the worker had typically accumulated an amount equal to half of the original loan amount or more in savings.

## **Incumbent Worker Training Services**

One of the features of the SWMERN-E was the combination of soft skills and occupational skills training provided to member firms. In combination with the career pathway development that the SWMERN-E had been doing with employer members (described in Chapter V), success coaches worked with incumbent workers on career development so that they could receive short-term occupational skills training and OJT. The focus on career pathway training for incumbent workers was larger and deeper in scope than originally planned.

As described in Chapter V, engaging employer members in robust career pathway development was somewhat slow to develop. However, Upjohn began offering short-term training to employers who could identify promising employees for occupational skills development, professional development, and promotion. These trainings came in the form of short-term classroom training and OJT. Classroom trainings were paid for fully by the grant; in the case of OJT, the grant reimbursed the employer up to 50 percent of the cost of worker wages for six weeks of training. The WIF-funded training manager reported that these OJT opportunities often led to promotion and pay increases for incumbent worker participants.

The WIF program manager and success coaches reported that they actively marketed incumbent worker training opportunities to SWMERN-E members during monthly network meetings and encouraged employers to offer training to their incumbent workforce. While classroom-based leadership, supervisory, and occupational skills training were the most common training programs provided, SWMERN-E firms were also encouraged by Upjohn staff and success coaches to utilize OJT for newly hired individuals who may have been lacking in some skills necessary for superior job performance, and for employees who had been with the company longer but needed OJT specific to the company to advance. Upjohn staff members encouraged employers to see the money saved as a benefit to all employees, and to consider using the reimbursed funds for paying next year's SWMERN-E fees or to put it into a fund for other employee training. The WIF training coordinator referred to OJT as a "grow your own" approach, and it was central to the development of short-term training offerings for both existing employees and new hires.

### ***Short-Term Classroom Training Focused on Leadership, Supervisory, and Occupational Skills***

Short-term classroom training was of two primary types: (1) cohort-based trainings for employees to attend leadership or supervisory trainings offered by local community colleges; and (2) individualized training for healthcare company employees looking to move into state-certified nursing assistant positions and for daycare workers looking to advance into state-certified teaching positions (See Exhibit VI-5). In total, 201 incumbent workers participated in these types of trainings.

#### **Leadership and Supervisory Training**

As of September 30, 2018, the SMWERN-E had sponsored student-employee attendance at four different iterations of supervisory and leadership courses:

- Leadership: Coaching on the Frontline (Kalamazoo Valley Community College)
- Principles of Leadership (Glen Oaks Community College)
- Succeeding as a Supervisor/Leadership Skills Training Program (Kellogg Community College)

- Succeeding as a Supervisor (Kellogg Community College)

Many of these courses were workforce development courses that already existed at the community colleges, but they were not regularly offered. This was one way in which the WIF grant was a benefit to the partner community colleges—it increased employer demand for these types of trainings.

The supervisory and leadership trainings covered topics such as:

- Understanding interpersonal relationship and communication styles
- Evaluating supervisory and leadership qualities
- Analyzing situational leadership
- Communication and key interpersonal skills
- Coaching versus bossing
- Managing conflict and performance issues

The courses served a total of 128 student-employees across 12 cohorts—individuals who were selected and/or approved by their employers to attend. Participants were from 19 (approximately half) of the SWMERN-E member firms. Additionally, one employer had 32 employees participate in a half-day “Professionalism: How to Be a Great Employee” session (offered twice in a week of professional development sessions hosted by the company). This session was designed to equip employees with professional and soft skills that would support their career growth and development.

The employers that took advantage of the incumbent worker professionalism and leadership training opportunities were varied, representing manufacturing, healthcare, and service sectors. Those who participated in the focus group during the last evaluation site visit, all of whom had sent employees to short-term leadership/supervisory training, described the trainings as valuable. One noted, “We’re a manufacturing company and we just don’t spend [money] on the softer skills, which people need.” Another said that, after promoting several people and signing them up for OJT, which reimburses a portion of employees’ wages for a period of time, “that pretty much paid for...our membership.”

At least one employer had some criticisms of the trainings themselves, however, pointing out that the philosophical approach to supervision and leadership in the workplace promoted differed from their company culture. In particular, they said that what was being taught in at least one of the trainings was more authoritarian, where they considered themselves to have a flatter culture of cooperation and shared leadership. This employer perceived the offer of short-term trainings as “kind of hit or miss” in terms of how valuable it was to have employees take them.

### Occupational Skills Training

Beyond the leadership and supervisory trainings, three other types of classroom-based occupational skills trainings were offered to incumbent workers. A total of 18 incumbent workers received CNA training through the grant, which covered supplies and state certification exam fees. This training was offered by four different providers:

- Comstock Public Schools
- Kellogg Community College
- Michigan Career and Technical Institute
- Ross Medical

The training providers had different program models that ranged in frequency and duration, from 75 hours of training provided over a three- or six-week period to 210 hours of training over 10 weeks.

These providers had multiple programs set up to meet the needs of different participant populations, including after-hours offerings for working students, sessions designed for employees with low basic skills, and sessions for people with disabilities.

Ten incumbent workers received child development associate (CDA) training, which included state certification exam fees paid for by the grant as part of the grant's emphasis on career pathways. Incumbent workers of member companies attended the training program offered by Southwest Child Resources, which included 144 hours of classroom-based educational instruction and 480 hours of experiential learning in the classroom. The program met monthly from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Incumbent workers in this program had access to a separate professional development specialist who assisted them with specialized coaching. Those who completed the training sat for the CDA certificate and a national industry-recognized certificate from the Council for Professional Recognition.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, 13 frontline incumbent workers received English as a Second Language (ESL) from a private instructor proficient in teaching English to non-native speakers. According to the training coordinator, "for personal, social, professional and safety reasons, improving one's ability to speak English is highly recommended for non-native speakers." While the availability of ESL classes was limited under the grant, ESL continues to be available as a service to employees of member companies, now provided by one of the success coaches, who is bilingual.

**Exhibit VI-5: Incumbent Worker Short-term Classroom Training**

| <u>Training Type</u>                        | <u>Training Provider</u>        | <u>Number of Cohorts</u> | <u>Total Number of Students Enrolled</u> |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Leadership and Supervisory Trainings        | KVCC<br>GOCC<br>KCC             | 12                       | 128                                      |
| Professionalism: How to Be a Great Employee | Employer                        | 1                        | 32                                       |
| Certified Nursing Assistant                 | Comstock<br>KCC<br>MCTI<br>Ross | (individualized)         | 18                                       |
| Child Development Associate                 | Southwest Child Resources       | 1                        | 10                                       |
| English as a Second Language                | Private instructor              | 1                        | 13                                       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                |                                 |                          | <b>201</b>                               |

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.cdacouncil.org/goldstandard> for a description of the CDA certificate.

## On-the-Job Training

A total of 170 incumbent workers, mainly new hires, were selected by their SWMERN-E member employers to complete OJT programs aimed at building skills for a current position or at advancing to a new role within their current company. These OJT sessions occurred across a variety of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, and financial services. Because these programs were funded by the grant, the employer was the training provider, and the training included job shadowing, supervised practice, and onsite instruction to learn new KSAs. Based on administrative data supplied by Upjohn training coordinator, all OJTs offered to incumbent workers helped individuals advance in their careers and resulted in modest wage increases of roughly \$2/hr. from their pre-OJT wage level.

One factor that appeared to be key to the growth of the use of short-term trainings and OJT over the course of the grant was the availability of knowledgeable staff members who could help employers navigate through the paperwork required to get funding for training or OJT. Many employers were intimidated by the process of applying for government assistance, but the WIF grant-funded training coordinator, appointed to that role about midway through the grant period, was able to clearly present the trainings as options at monthly member meetings, answer questions, assist employers through the process, and show them that it was not as difficult as they feared.

## Reasons Cited for Undertaking Short-Term Classroom Training and OJT

Overall, 201 individuals received classroom-based short-term occupational skills training (i.e., leadership/supervisory, CNA, and CDA). SPR surveyed 135 of these individuals and 123 responded, resulting in a 91 percent response rate.<sup>29</sup> Of the 170 who received OJT (new hires and incumbent workers wishing to advance in their careers), 93 received the survey; of those 93 workers, 29 responded, resulting in a 31 percent response rate.<sup>30</sup>

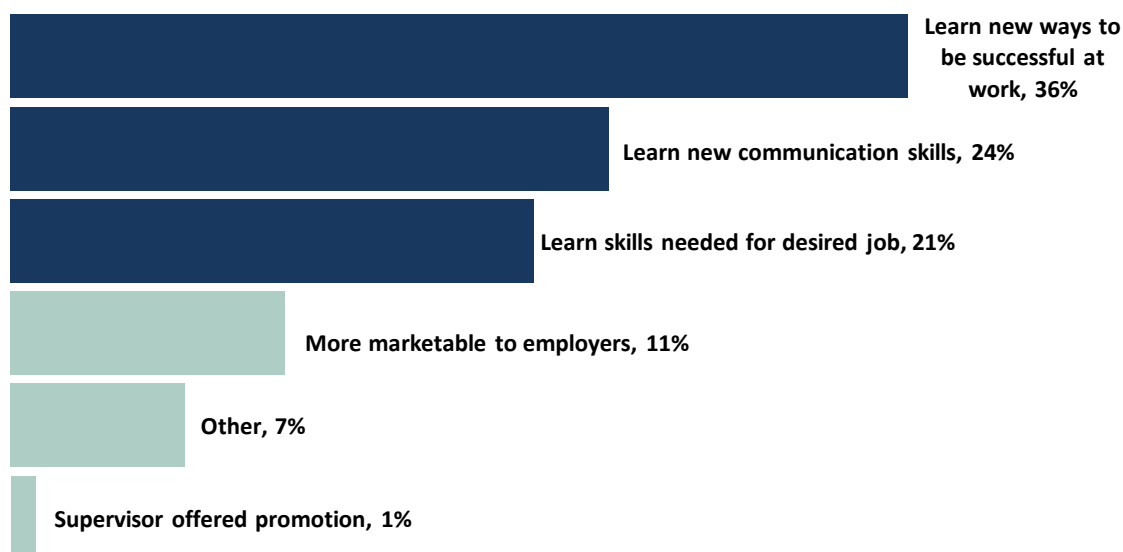
Incumbent workers who undertook short-term training or OJT reported several different reasons for doing so. The most common reasons were focused on increasing success in the respondents' given jobs—learning new ways to be successful at work (36 percent), learning new ways to communicate at work with supervisors and coworkers (24 percent), and learning new skills needed for desired job (21 percent); other less common reasons for undertaking short-term training or participating in an OJT included becoming more marketable to employers (11 percent), other (7 percent), and supervisor offered a promotion (1 percent).

---

<sup>29</sup> Not all short-term classroom-based training cohorts were surveyed. Survey administration ended in June 2018 in order to meet final report deadlines; in addition, a few early cohorts were not surveyed.

<sup>30</sup> Not all OJT workers were surveyed. Survey administration ended in June 2018 in order to meet final report deadlines.

### Exhibit VI-6: Incumbent Workers' Reasons for Undertaking Short-Term Training and/or OJTs



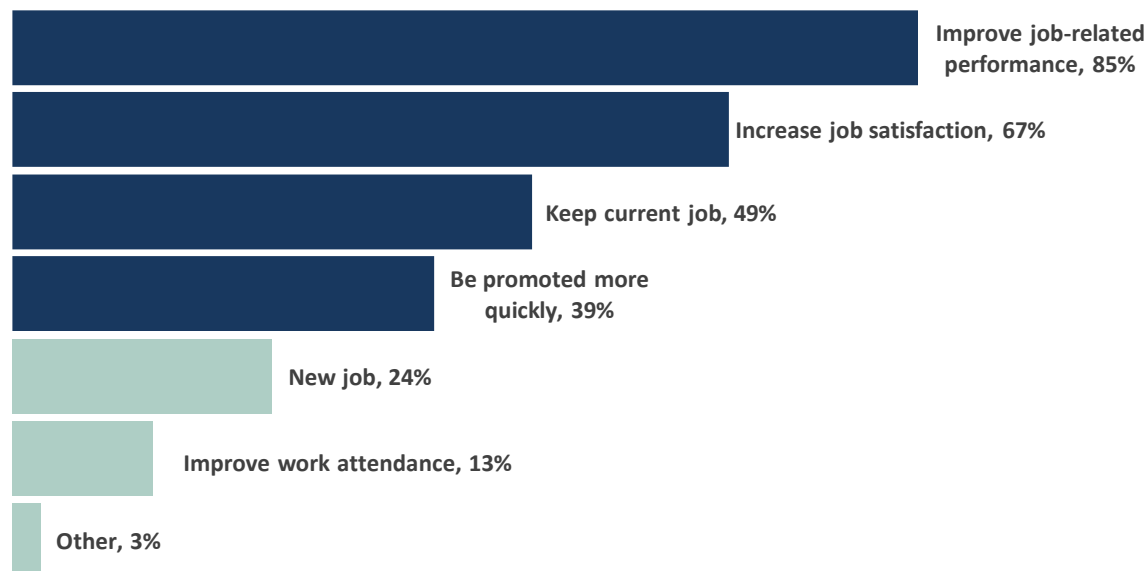
Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey responses (n = 152).

There was a fairly low threshold for participating in short-term training or OJT. Almost half (47 percent) of survey respondents reported that, before they could participate, they had to meet with a supervisor or member of the HR department; other survey choices, such as “fill out a training application” or “meet with the training provider,” were selected by few respondents—11 percent and 1 percent, respectively. Given high rates of training completion, the choice to keep the threshold of participation low seems merited, especially given that employees appear to have been largely hand-picked for training opportunities.

Eighty percent of respondents felt that they received enough information about the training before undertaking it. Few reported facing obstacles to taking the training: Most (88 percent) reported no obstacles, and only 8 percent indicated that they had faced some obstacles. These obstacles included an inconvenient training location (2 percent) or inconvenient schedule (3 percent), not being able to afford to take time off to go to the training (1 percent), not being able to obtain permission to take time off (1 percent), and feeling that it was too much of a time commitment (1 percent).

Respondents indicated what they believed participating in the training would help them achieve. As with the closely-related question about why they took the training, the most common responses had to do with improving job-related performance (85 percent), increasing job satisfaction (67 percent), keeping current job (49 percent), and being promoted more quickly (39 percent).

### Exhibit VI-7: What Incumbent Workers Believed Training Would Help Them Achieve



Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey responses (n = 152).

## Challenges and Successes in Serving Incumbent Workers

Providing success coaching services to incumbent workers—and, under the grant, expanding those services to include short-term training and OJT—was one of the cornerstones of the SWMERN-E model. There were, however, some challenges.

- **Coaches felt their services were underused at some employer locations, and some employers echoed that sentiment.** There is a multitude of potential interrelated reasons why success coach services were not taken up by as many employees as could have benefited from them. Some survey respondents indicated that they were uncomfortable receiving assistance from a success coach at their workplace. They often cited “personal reasons,” presumably related to concerns about privacy or about not being able to get away from work duties during the time that the success coach was on site. In some cases, the spaces that success coaches had access to for meetings were not ideal for privacy. The training coordinator added that there was a missed opportunity to promote the availability of success coaching services by the SWMERN-E members within their firms. She added that more could have been done to promote the availability of success coach services via phone, email, and text, especially for second and third shift workers.
- **Success coaches were challenged by the lack of access to resources to directly aid workers who came to them for help.** The SWMERN model, even in the expansion, did not provide coaches with a budget for financial or in-kind assistance, such as transportation or childcare vouchers. The coaches offered talk-based assistance, and they could make referrals to community and public sources of support as well as assist workers in connecting to referral

sources. Coaching and referrals, according to survey results, were very helpful to the individuals who took advantage of them, but coaches wished they had more to offer. As one coach said, “Sometimes I feel like I’m failing because I can’t provide the services.” In fact, survey results suggest that a small minority of individuals (10 percent) faced barriers accessing resources they were referred to. But the problem was also systemic and outside the control of the success coaches—wages are stagnant in many industry sectors, and the housing market is tight for individuals looking for lower-income rental properties. Many government assistance programs are income-based, and sometimes people find themselves just above the threshold of qualification, but without the means to resolve their issue (be it housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, legal matters, etc.) with only the resources they have from their wages and savings.

“I think it’s nice to help people. It’s nice to remove barriers. It’s nice to keep employees retained. But I think, at least for me, it’s super cool when it’s changing the culture of an organization. That’s where you’re going to see real change, because it’s very difficult to make an impact on somebody’s culture. But you have to have buy-in from the top....It’s a lot of work, and it’s a long-term thing.”

**SWMERN-E Success Coach**

- **A heavy workload and high rate of turnover among HR points of contact was a challenge for success coaches.** Several coaches and employer respondents talked about how overburdened HR departments can be. Many HR respondents over the years have noted that one of the reasons the SWMERN-E membership was so valuable is that success coaches can be like an addition to the department, expanding their capacity to help employees. In some cases, however, this overburden prevented the development of a relationship with the success coaches in the first place, which contributed to underuse of their services. Turnover also created challenges, as success coaches had to educate each new HR director about who they were and what they could do. On a more minor note, coaches described challenges typical of itinerant employees—not having access to the infrastructure of a stable office, such as printing, consistent wireless network access, and the like.

SWMERN-E coaches and members also reported a number of successes, however:

- **Success coaches and employer members often relied on trial and error to increase visibility and accessibility (and, in turn, utilization) of success coaches.** For example, one success coach’s four-hour “shift” initially occurred over a lunch break, based on the idea that that this would be convenient for employees. However, employees rarely visited during lunch. The success coach learned that the employer would allow employees to meet during non-lunch-break work hours, which the employees preferred. The coach changed the shift and saw an increase in utilization thereafter.
- **Coaches described two distinct types of success in their services—helping individuals via coaching and seeing company culture changes.** A success coach described the excitement of being involved in changes at one employer as they moved from using staffing agencies to doing almost all direct hires, and as they opened an in-house wellness clinic for employees. Coaches also described breakthrough moments, such as a meeting where several managers

shared their sense of positive changes for their supervisees who had sought success coach services. Testimonials like these encouraged other managers to refer individuals to the success coach.

- **Short-term training and OJT over the latter half of the grant resulted in numerous employees (new hires and incumbent workers) obtaining the skills needed to maintain employment and/or advancing to new positions and wage increases.** This was a clear success of the SWMERN-E. However, grant administrators would have preferred to provide grant-funded training to a larger number of incumbent workers. They felt they could have done so if they had been able to communicate value-add and feasibility to employers earlier on.

Overall, services to incumbent workers were a mainstay benefit of SWMERN-E membership. Over the course of the grant period, the success coach team grew as network membership grew, and some success coaches took on specialized roles on the coaching team. Rates of success coach service uptake also grew over the course of the grant, and coaches reported being a part of larger cultural shifts at some member companies. Finally, incumbent worker services expanded during the grant period to include an array of trainings designed to support worker professional development and career advancement; nearly half of the member companies in the expanded network took advantage of these opportunities.

## VII. Jobseeker Services

---

One of the objectives under the WIF grant was to meet SWMERN-E members' demand for workers by assisting them in filling open positions with qualified jobseekers. Over the course of the grant, however, there was a shift from placing individual jobseekers into vacant positions with SWMERN-E member companies to providing cohort-based training to jobseekers, some of whom were eventually placed at SWMERN-E member companies. Individuals who undertook these trainings were not employed with SWMERN-E member companies and were considered jobseekers because they were seeking additional occupational skills training for employment or better employment.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on data from site visits and jobseeker training surveys, this chapter explores this shift in approach to jobseeker services over the course of the grant, the recruitment strategies used to attract jobseekers to training, the types of jobseeker training programs funded by the WIF grant, jobseekers' reasons for undertaking trainings, and the challenges and successes associated with jobseeker services.

### Key Findings

- **Initial attempts to use the network, especially success coaches, to facilitate placement of jobseekers with SWMERN-E member companies was less effective than envisioned.** Employers saw the benefit of membership in the SWMERN-E primarily as access to success coaching services for incumbent workers, rather than as a new avenue for filling open positions.
- **Sponsoring relevant occupational skills training for jobseekers proved to be a successful strategy for helping SWMERN-E members fill open positions.** The SWMERN-E ultimately aimed to strengthen the pipeline of qualified candidates through support of occupational skills training for jobseekers. Over the course of the grant, close to 150 jobseekers undertook training in five different types of training programs for occupations in which SWMERN-E members had openings.
- **Jobseekers who completed training and responded to the jobseeker survey described numerous barriers to obtaining employment, but they were committed to using training to secure their existing jobs and/or advance into more satisfying, higher-skilled, higher-paying work.** They indicated a wide array of reasons for participating in training, and they anticipated benefits of doing so. All these benefits centered on improving their chances for stable, satisfying employment and advancement.

---

<sup>31</sup> The SWMERN-E administrators did not screen training candidates for employment status. For the purposes of the evaluation, all individuals who undertook grant-funded training who were not employed with SWMERN-E member companies were considered jobseekers.

## Using Success Coaches to Recruit and Place Jobseekers with SWMERN-E Members

Based on input from SWMERN employers who spoke frequently about their difficulties finding and keeping qualified applicants, the WIF grant proposal envisioned that SWMERN-E businesses would share lists of their job openings with their success coach who would coordinate with MWSW service centers and other community partners to recruit jobseekers for the positions. The intent was to identify jobseekers with the requisite skills and then refer them to SWMERN-E member businesses with job openings to screen for potential hire. For job applicants who needed skills remediation, it was anticipated that the member employer would work with a success coach to help them enroll in SWMERN-E-supported training. Members were inconsistent in providing job postings to success coaches for a variety of reasons, however. Most SWMERN-E employer representatives interviewed reported using a variety of approaches to find qualified applicants for open employment positions, including online job posting services such as LinkedIn, Indeed, ZipRecruiter and Pure Michigan Talent Connect (PMTCT); staffing agencies; community job fairs; MWSW service centers; and career services staff and centers at community and technical colleges.

Despite the initial expectation that employers would use success coaches to fill open positions, few reported doing so. Success coaches primarily focused on serving incumbent workers and were seen by employers as lacking the capacity to do prescreening and assessment. Moreover, employers saw requests for job listings as duplicative of other avenues they were pursuing to fill open positions. Several members of the SWMERN-E administrative team, including success coaches, also suggested that HR departments at member companies were often too busy to cultivate the success coaches as a new source of referrals and placement assistance.

Although the initial plan to use success coaches to directly facilitate job placement for SWMERN-E employers largely did not materialize, the grant team did contribute to larger efforts aimed at helping employers fill vacant positions through the development of a closer relationship with the MWSW BSTs. The WIF program manager at Upjohn began attending BST monthly meetings to raise awareness about the SWMERN-E and member employers' needs. One byproduct of the WIF program manager's attendance was identification of employers already using Pure Michigan Talent Connect, the state's labor exchange system, to recruit job applicants. This allowed the BSTs (with help from the success coaches) to market Pure Michigan Talent Connect to employers who were not yet using it as a resource for recruiting qualified jobseekers.

## Short-Term Training for Jobseekers

The connection between SWMERN-E member companies and BSTs notwithstanding, the primary strategy used to help SWMERN-E members fill open positions was grant-funded jobseeker training. As shown in Exhibit VII-1, the WIF grant funded 13 training cohorts for 141 jobseekers over the course of the grant.<sup>32</sup> This included five production technician trainings, two computer numeric

---

<sup>32</sup> In its final performance report to US DOL, Upjohn reported that 247 jobseekers received training. In fact, they reported 106 people twice—once for enrollment in essential skills training and once for enrollment in technical skills training. SPR is reporting the unduplicated total of 141 (247 - 106 = 141).

controlled (CNC) operator trainings, two warehouse management trainings, two CNA trainings, and one training in culinary arts and sustainable food. In addition to the training cohorts, Upjohn funded 13 individual training slots for jobseekers in three CNA programs. The trainings offered over the course of the grant trained jobseekers for positions in the manufacturing, health care, and hospitality industries—dominant industries represented on the SWMERN-E. By September 2018, 136 of 141 participants had completed one of these short-term training programs.

#### Exhibit VII-1: Jobseeker Training Offered through the SWMERN-E

| <u>Training Type</u>                                            | <u>Soft-Skills Training Provider</u> | <u>Technical-Skills Training Provider</u> | <u>Number of Cohorts</u> | <u>Total Number of Students Enrolled</u> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Production Technician                                           | Momentum                             | KVCC                                      | 5                        | 56                                       |
| CNC Operator                                                    | Momentum                             | KVCC                                      | 2                        | 21                                       |
| Warehouse Management                                            | Momentum                             | KVCC                                      | 2                        | 20                                       |
| Certified Nursing Assistant                                     | n/a                                  | MCTI<br>Comstock<br>KCC<br>Ross           | 2                        | 33                                       |
| Culinary and Sustainable Food                                   | Momentum                             | KVCC                                      | 1                        | 11                                       |
| Number of jobseeker participants across all training programs = |                                      |                                           |                          | 141                                      |

Notes: Includes jobseeker training programs offered January 2016–September 2018.

A need for skilled labor among SWMERN-E members was the driving factor behind the expansion of jobseeker training offerings, especially for entry-level positions in pathways related to nursing as well as warehouse management and inventory control. These were added to the training offerings during the grant period, and together they comprised about a third of all jobseekers trained. Production technician program participants comprised another third, and the CNC operator cohort and culinary arts cohort together made up the final third.

Technical components of the trainings were provided through a community college or technical school, such as Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC), Kellogg Community College (KCC), Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI), Comstock Public Schools (Comstock), and Ross Medical Education Center (Ross). Trainings lasted from three to 10 weeks, depending on the program and the provider.

For all except CNA, trainings began with a multiweek soft-skills component provided by a nonprofit organization, Momentum Urban Employment Initiative (Momentum). Topics included life skills (such as budgeting and financial management) and job readiness skills (such as communication, timeliness, and professionalism). Momentum paired graduates with long-term mentors who were available to provide support when graduates faced new life challenges, including those associated with new employment.

Other types of wraparound services were available to other training participants. Students who participated in the four cohorts of training through KVCC, for instance, were offered life coaching services by Urban Alliance/Momentum during and after training completion. Some of the students who enrolled in grant-funded CNA classes offered through MCTI were also Michigan Rehabilitation Services consumers and, as such, received access to a wide variety of additional services, accommodations on state exams, job search and placement assistance, and custom work clothing and shoes.

Trainees were recruited from a variety of organizations serving low-skill and long-term unemployed individuals, including Momentum. After the programs were complete, employers were invited to attend a job fair so that they could have “first pick” of graduates. The training providers and the SWMERN-E administrators alerted employers about job fairs after each training program cohort; according to one training provider, however, fewer SWMERN-E members than expected attended the job fairs.

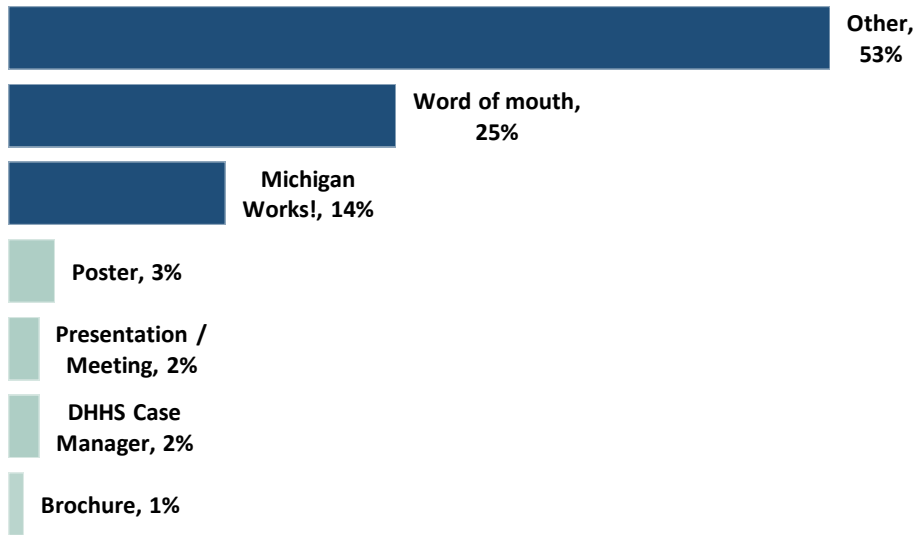
Over the course of the grant, the number of incumbent workers participating in short-term classroom-based training or OJT eventually surpassed the number of jobseekers trained (see Chapter VI). As described above, the SWMERN-E administrators realized that the plan to help members fill vacancies was not unfolding as envisioned; as members came to understand its availability, incumbent worker training was of great interest and value to the network.

## **Participant Perspectives on Training**

Participant input reported in this section is derived from a survey that jobseekers completed near the end of each training session. Chapter IX provides more detail about jobseeker satisfaction with and outcomes resulting from training.

Jobseekers heard about SWMERN-E-funded trainings in a variety of ways. As shown in Exhibit VII-2, 25 percent heard about it through word of mouth and 14 percent from MWSW service centers. More than half of respondents (53 percent) heard about trainings through other means, including, as indicated by open-ended responses, probation officers, drug court, and a variety of community- and faith-based organizations. This array of sources suggests that there was good awareness of the trainings and training providers in the community.

## Exhibit VII-2: How Jobseeker Trainees Learned About SWMERN-E Training

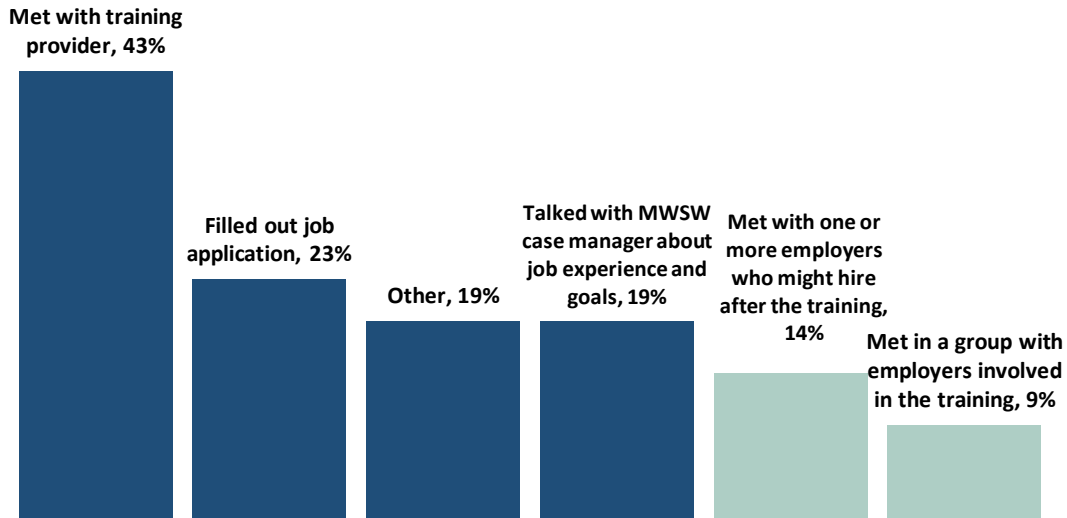


Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey responses (n=102).

Almost all jobseeker survey respondents (91 percent) indicated the information they received prior to enrolling in training was adequate, which suggests success coaches, training providers, and MWSW counselors did a good job of sharing information about SWMERN-E-funded programs.

The survey also asked about what was required of jobseekers prior to enrolling in training. As shown in Exhibit VII-3, respondents reported a variety of requirements, such as meeting with the training provider (43 percent), filling out a job application (23 percent), meeting with a MWSW case manager to discuss job experience and goals (19 percent), and meeting with an employer or group of employers for reasons such as being pre-screened for potential hire after successful completion of the training (23 percent). These activities suggest a commitment to job placement for training participants on the part of the SWMERN-E administration team, MWSW, and training provider partners. Nineteen percent of respondents indicated that they participated in some other type of activity before undertaking training; most of these individuals said they filled out a separate application for Urban Alliance/Momentum, the soft-skills provider.

### Exhibit VII-3: Activities Jobseeker Participants Were Required to Undertake Before Training

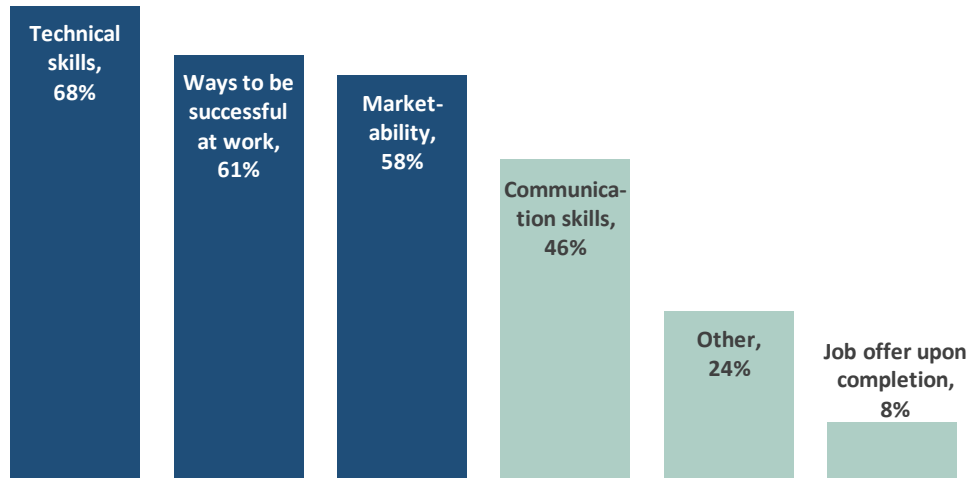


Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey responses (n=102).

Participants were asked to indicate all the reasons that they had enrolled in jobseeker training. Responses included: to learn technical skills (68 percent); to learn new ways to be successful at work (61 percent); to be more marketable to employers (58 percent); and to learn new ways to communicate with employers and coworkers (46 percent). These responses suggest that, while some “jobseekers” may have been working, most were seeking better work, through improvement in their existing employment or better jobs. Nearly a quarter of respondents offered other reasons for enrolling in training, such as navigating the search for employment with a criminal record, re-entering employment after retirement, and, more generally, to “change my life,” “better myself,” or “overcome adversity”—an indication of the different kinds of barriers to employment that individuals who undertook grant-funded training were facing.

A small proportion (8 percent) indicated that they enrolled because an employer offered them a job if they completed the training. This relatively small portion is consistent with what employers and SWMERN-E administrators reported—that, for the most part, employers did not vet training participants and then hire them upon completion, which was the original vision for jobseeker training funded through the grant.

#### Exhibit VII-4: Reasons Jobseekers Sought Training

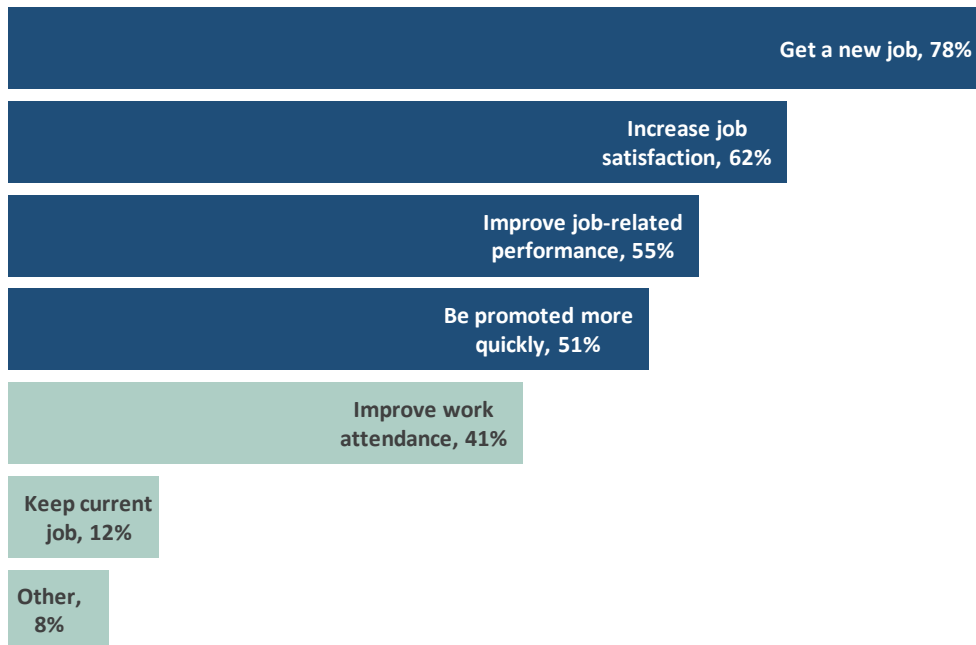


Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey responses (n=102).

As indicated earlier, jobseekers recruited for SWMERN-E training programs were facing multiple barriers to employment. Survey findings confirm this: Half of respondents indicated they faced obstacles to participation during training (not shown). The most commonly named obstacles were meeting household expenses while in training (26 percent), lack of transportation (19 percent), and lack of childcare (9 percent). Nearly one-fourth provided open-ended answers covering an array of situational challenges, several of which had to do with obligations associated with the criminal justice system, such as meeting with a parole or probation officer. However, several noted they had been assisted in overcoming the obstacles by the training provider or another party. Even with barriers, these individuals went forward with training, presumably because the obstacles were navigable and due to the benefits individuals anticipated the training would help them achieve.

As shown in Exhibit VII-5, respondents anticipated a number of benefits to participating in training. More than three-quarters of respondents (78 percent) believed that participating in the training would help them get a new job. Substantially more than half (62 percent) felt it would help increase their job satisfaction. More than half thought it would help improve their job performance (55 percent) and help them get promoted more quickly (51 percent). Just over 40 percent felt that it would help their attendance at work and, relatedly, 12 percent felt it would help them keep their current job. Thus, it seems that training likely benefited individuals facing either unemployment or precarity at work due to poor performance or frequent absenteeism, as well as individuals hoping to speed career advancement.

## Exhibit VII-5: Anticipated Benefits of Training



Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey responses (n=102).

## Challenges and Successes with Jobseeker Services

The SWMERN-E project experienced several key challenges related to administering and providing jobseeker services.

- **Obtaining information on job openings from SWMERN-E members proved difficult.** Under the grant, SWMERN-E members were meant to provide lists of available job positions to success coaches, who would then coordinate with MWSW staff to find candidates who had the skills needed to fill those positions, but that did not occur. Some success coaches reported that SWMERN-E members' HR departments were understaffed and faced significant turnover, which impeded their ability to provide up-to-date information on available job positions.
- **Many jobseekers had limited basic skills, which affected their ability to enroll in SWMERN-E jobseeker training programs.** Community college and technical education program providers have eligibility requirements—minimum basic skills levels and a criminal background check—that were challenging for many jobseekers to meet. For example, local CNA programs are some of the more restrictive entry-level training programs and, moreover, they have long wait lists to enroll; this limited the number of jobseekers who could pursue this type of occupational skills training.
- **Not all SWMERN-E employer members participated in job training graduations and job fairs hosted by the training providers, although some jobseekers did find immediate post-training employment.** Several training providers and members of the SWMERN-E administrative team reported frustration with member businesses because only limited numbers attended events

meant to help their companies fill open job positions. However, some jobseeker training participants did find employment through job fairs—with both SWMERN-E companies and non-member companies.

An important success of the SWMERN expansion related to employer members' perceptions of jobseekers.

- **SWMERN-E members were impressed by the degree of support made available to jobseekers through the soft-skills training component and long-term mentoring.** There was concern on the part of some member companies that trainees, even after completing a training program, would not have the stability to remain successfully employed. However, Momentum's long-term mentor model, combined with the availability of success coaches at the employer site, changed at least a few minds over the course of the grant. In interviews, several employers commented that their participation in the SWMERN-E had allowed them to have a more open mind about hiring jobseekers with barriers because so many had successfully completed SWMERN-E training and came highly recommended by community partners. One employer stated, "SWMERN-E has been a really great thing for us, too. [We are] trying to find these areas within the community that maybe we wouldn't have explored before, trying to find employees. And that's worked out really well for us, too. So, just kind of keeping our minds open to other possibilities."

Overall, the aim of the grant to help employers fill open positions evolved from a vision of direct placement through success coaches to training jobseekers for in-demand positions with SWMERN-E member companies. At the same time, the SWMERN-E administrative team strengthened the relationship between the MWSW BSTs and SMWERN-E member companies. Jobseeker trainings typically involved a soft-skills component and an occupational skills component, and occupational programs were selected for grant funding based on capacity among local training providers and employer member need. Individuals took up training in order to improve their employment outcomes—largely, new or better jobs through increased technical and soft skills.

## VIII. SWMERN-E Program Costs

---

The cost study explored the costs of operating the SWMERN-E program from multiple perspectives. This chapter discusses these findings, divided into two parts. The first part outlines the overall approach to the analysis, describing the data sources used, the approach taken to analyzing the data, and some key limitations of this analysis. The second part describes the costs of operating the SWMERN-E program, explaining how Upjohn allocated and used WIF funds and leveraged resources, as well as how and why costs varied by type of cost and type of participant.

### Key Findings

- **Upjohn spent \$2,320,657 of the WIF grant on the operation of the SWMERN-E program, yielding a cost per participant of \$856.** The figure reported here is different from the total WIF award amount (\$3 million) for three reasons: (1) it is expressed in constant 2015 dollars, (2) it does not include payments to SPR for evaluation, and (3) the grant utilization rate may have been less than 100 percent. When leveraged resources are factored in, the total spent is \$3,277,316, yielding a cost per participant of \$1,259.
- **A notable aspect of SWMERN-E is the large amount of leveraged resources compared to the amount of grant costs.** Leveraged resources represent more than one-third of overall costs and almost half of the actual WIF spending.
- **Over half of the program's total expenditures were on outside services or subcontracts.** More than 80 percent of this amount was used to pay for classroom training and OJT reimbursement (up to 50 percent of an employee's wages for six weeks of training).

### Approach to the Cost Study

Using the data sources and analytic approach outlined below, the cost study sought to answer the following questions:

- How did Upjohn utilize grant funds, both at the whole-project level and for specific types of spending?
- What resources did Upjohn and SWMERN-E members leverage to supplement the WIF grant?
- How did grant expenditures and costs per participant vary by type of cost?

### Data Sources

The cost analysis drew on the following types of data:

- SWMERN-E expenditure data describe Upjohn's spending on the SWMERN-E program—that is, the costs incurred to manage the program and provide services to all participants (incumbent workers and jobseekers). To provide a more precise estimate of operating

costs, these data exclude funds used to pay for the third-party evaluation, which was not a cost of operating the program itself.

- Leveraged resources data include information on resources other than those from the WIF grant that were used to support SWMERN-E program costs. These include funds provided by MDHHS to pay the salaries of two success coaches, SWMERN-E member dues, and supportive services to participants funded through WIOA.

All data used in the cost study were provided by Upjohn.

## ***Analytic Approach***

To conduct the analysis, the study team processed the raw cost data, which included quarterly cost reports submitted electronically by Upjohn fiscal staff to the study team starting in June 2018; a final quarterly cost report was received on April 26, 2019. The first step was to group the data into the following categories: administrative staff and program service delivery staff costs (both direct and indirect); materials and supplies; administrative/overhead; direct payments for outside services, such as supportive services, education, and/or training; and leveraged resources, including grants, donations, and in-kind contributions. To account for inflation during the grant period, the study team standardized all amounts using the average Consumer Price Index for program year (PY) 2014–2015 (October 1, 2014–September 30, 2015).

The study team looked at the data at the program level, both with and without leveraged resources:

- Program-level costs were examined overall and by specific categories (e.g., staffing) for Upjohn and for the services that it funded that benefited SWMERN-E companies.
- Program costs with and without leveraged resources provided different insights. Leveraged resources are important because they reflect the full set of resources used to operate the program. At the same time, the analysis of resources and costs without leveraged resources can help policymakers better understand (1) the actual ways that WIF grant monies were spent, and (2) costs that must be borne by an administrative entity rather than by community partners.

## ***Limitations of the Analysis and Corrective Measures Taken***

The data used and the analysis itself have two limitations that are important to consider when interpreting the results:

- The leveraged resources data do not account for any services that incumbent workers received from outside sources, such as government-funded programs or community and faith-based organizations. The administrative database, Successforce, tracked that referrals were made, but success coaches did not document supportive services provided by outside partners, nor did the system track the amount of time spent by partner program staff members serving each participant. For this reason, it is likely that leveraged resources are significantly underreported.
- We cannot provide an analysis of cost per outcome for SWMERN-E participants because outcomes data (such as on retention in the job) were not consistently or adequately

collected by grant staff members.<sup>33</sup> While some outcomes data were collected through participant surveys, a low response rate means those surveys cannot be used to adequately gauge outcomes.

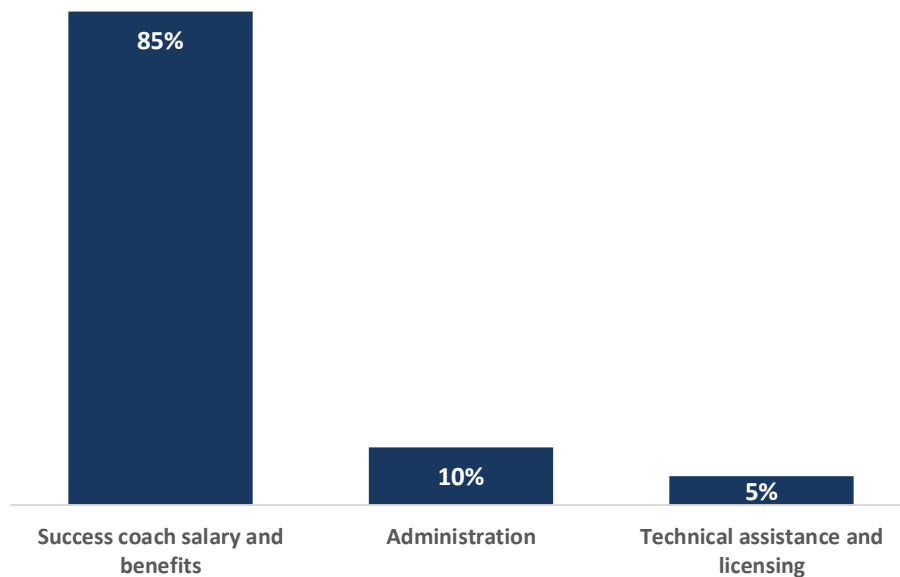
## **SWMERN-E Program Costs**

### ***General Costs of Operating an ERN***

The main costs involved in operating an ERN are success coaches' salaries. Therefore, the overall cost is mainly dependent on the number of success coaches, their anticipated salaries and benefit levels, and the number of member businesses that can support them. The typical operating budget for an ERN with 8–10 employers and one success coach with an annual salary between \$45,000 and \$50,000 is approximately \$75,000 per year.<sup>34</sup>

As shown in Exhibit VIII-1, approximately 85 percent of ERN operating costs are allocated to the salary and benefits of the success coach. Approximately 10 percent of costs are typically routed towards general administration for meetings and financial administration (e.g., collection of membership dues). Another 5 percent are designated for the ERN administrator for licensing, technical assistance, and data administration.

**Exhibit VIII-1: General ERN Cost Breakdown**



Source: Telephone interview with James Vander Hulst, West Michigan TEAM (June 4, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> More details on outcomes are offered in Chapter IX and in Appendix A, which describes survey methodology.

<sup>34</sup> Telephone interview with James Vander Hulst, West Michigan TEAM (June 4, 2018).

## ***SWMERN-E Fee Structure***

The costs of operating the SWMERN-E depended on several variables: the number and types of employers joining, the availability and amount of seed funding obtained to help defray the cost of employers' membership dues,<sup>35</sup> the administrative and operational costs of West Michigan TEAM, and the organization serving as the employer of record for success coaches. (During the WIF grant there were two employers of record—Upjohn and MDHHS.) The fee structure and membership costs for the SWMERN-E project were negotiated with employer members as part of the SWMERN start-up process, prior to the WIF grant. At its inception in 2010, the SWMERN had to decide whether membership dues would be based on employment levels, on utilization, or on a flat fee for all members. At that point, members of the SWMERN decided that the flat-fee structure (where every business contributes equally to funding the model) was the simplest to budget for; it also decreased the need for the ERN administrator to show relative benefit to individual employers that might be paying different rates.

In ERNs generally, the average cost of a four-hour share of a success coach's time varies depending on the cost of living for the local area and what type of organization is serving as the employer of record. Both employers of record for SWMERN-E success coaches (Upjohn and MDHHS) paid a higher wage to their employees—based on acceptable cost of living adjustments and benefit levels—than do other ERNs in Michigan and New York. As such, the cost for membership in the SWMERN-E was slightly higher than for ERNs elsewhere.

Under the WIF grant, Upjohn and West Michigan TEAM used grant resources to offset 50 percent of each employer member's first-year membership dues. This allowed success coaches and West Michigan TEAM the opportunity to prove the model was worthwhile. After the first year, employers covered 100 percent of their SWMERN-E membership dues, which were \$4,812.50 per year for a four-hour weekly share of a success coach's time.

Without WIF grant funding, Upjohn and West Michigan TEAM would have worked with a local foundation or nonprofit organization to offset the first-year cost of membership. Moreover, since only the first year of SWMERN-E membership was subsidized by the WIF grant, it was important for West Michigan TEAM, the WIF program manager, and the success coaches to communicate with community members and with the businesses they recruited about the long-term costs of retaining their membership.

---

<sup>35</sup> When it was originally being formed in 2010, the SWMERN obtained seed funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and United Way Battle Creek to offset planning and implementation start-up costs. Additional seed funding for expansion of the SWMERN in Kalamazoo County came from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation. Funding to expand the SWMERN into Branch and St. Joseph Counties was secured from the US DOL WIF grant. The WIF grant provided funding to cover 50 percent of membership costs for any new employer joining the SWMERN-E from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2018.

## ***SWMERN-E Program Allocation Costs***

As shown below in Exhibit VIII-2, Upjohn spent \$2,320,657 of its \$3 million WIF grant on the operation of the SWMERN-E program, yielding a cost per participant of \$870.<sup>36</sup> When leveraged resources are factored in, the total is \$3,277,316, yielding a cost per participant of \$1,259.

A notable aspect of the SWMERN-E is the extent to which Upjohn leveraged resources from partners in the community to provide services. Leveraged costs represented more than one-third of overall SWMERN-E costs, and almost half of the WIF-covered costs. US DOL's Solicitation for Grant Agreements had a recommended leveraged funding goal of 20 percent, and the SWMERN-E project leveraged more than double this (44.7 percent). This was the result of two things: (1) the ERN model assumed employers would cover a portion of their fees from their own funds, and (2) Upjohn's status as the WIOA administrative entity enabled the agency to leverage other streams of funding to serve SWMERN-E participants.

In addition, Upjohn leveraged significant resources from partners in the community. For example, it obtained approximately \$8,600 from a partnership with the Battle Creek Shared Services Alliance, a consortium of childcare providers; these funds were used to pay participants' testing fees and for an educational consultant to assist participants in incumbent worker training. Community Corrections helped offset \$8,800 in training costs for nine jobseekers enrolled in career academies. In addition, 16 jobseeker students who enrolled in Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) academies were co-enrolled in Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS), the state vocational rehabilitation agency. MRS leveraged approximately \$25,000 to provide these students with needed services, such as cognitive and psychological testing; ADA accommodations on the state exam; identification of classroom and testing accommodations, if they decided to further their education; and specialized job search assistance and coaching.

**Exhibit VIII-2: Total SWMERN-E Program Cost and Cost Per Participant**

|                                                    | <u>Total Cost</u> | <u>Number of Participants</u> | <u>Cost Per Participant</u> |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Program cost</b>                                | \$2,264,576       | 2,604                         | \$870                       |
| <b>Program cost, including leveraged resources</b> | \$3,277,316       | 2,604                         | \$1,259                     |

Source: Michigan WIF grant expenditure reports from Upjohn; email communication (for leveraged resources) from training coordinator.

Notes: The number of participants does not coincide with the number reported by Upjohn to US DOL. Upjohn double counted individuals who received training (soft skills and occupational skills training) for a total count of 618, whereas SPR calculated the unduplicated training participant number as n=512; SPR also included success coach participants (n=2,092). The SPR total cost per participant with and without leveraged resources is based on the assumption that training participants were not also success coach participants. Overlap is possible, but SPR estimates that the extent is minor. Data on the two groups were stored in different

---

<sup>36</sup> Total spending reported here is different from the total WIF award amount (\$3 million) for three reasons: (1) it is expressed in constant 2015 dollars, (2) it does not include payments to SPR for evaluation, and (3) the grant utilization rate may have been less than 100 percent.

databases that could not be crosschecked, so SPR could not verify this assumption. The remainder of this section explores types of costs and costs per participant by type of participation. As shown below in Exhibit VIII-3, Upjohn spent \$1,168,998 (just over 50 percent of total program expenditures) on outside services or subcontracts. More than 80 percent of this amount was paid to training providers for the provision of training, both classroom-based training and OJT reimbursement of up to 50 percent of an employee's wages for six weeks of training.

Another key cost was staff labor (both salaries and fringe benefits) for success coaches and for Upjohn employees with programmatic responsibilities, including overseeing program implementation, tracking performance measures, managing contracts, and managing WIF grant finances. Low-skilled workers require substantial support to stay employed and engaged in educational and vocational training, which means that programs like Upjohn need both a sufficiently large staff and sufficiently experienced staff members to provide this support. Therefore, salaries and fringe benefits—which allowed Upjohn to provide these services—accounted for almost half of total costs.

Upjohn spent smaller amounts on overhead and materials. These latter costs represent allocations from the grant for rent and office expenses (at Upjohn), as well as for staff travel and materials and supplies (such as printing, copying, and binding of program materials).

**Exhibit VIII-3: Program Costs by Type of Cost**

| <u>Cost Category</u>            | <u>Amount</u>      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Outside Services/Subcontracts   | \$1,168,998        |
| Staff Labor (Salary and Fringe) | \$1,048,211        |
| Overhead/Administration         | \$ 41,803          |
| Materials and Supplies          | \$ 5,564           |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>\$2,264,576</b> |

Source: Michigan WIF grant expenditure reports from Upjohn.

Lastly, the study team calculated the average costs for each main type of participant (training participants vs. success coach participants). This was done by weighting each cost category by the proportion of each group among total participants, adding the resulting quantities, and then dividing the result by the size of each group.<sup>37</sup> As shown in Exhibit VIII-4, the average direct costs for the training participants were more than four times larger than average costs for participants receiving success coach services. This is unsurprising, given that training represented close to half of all direct grant costs. This reiterates that training services tend to be much more expensive than staffed services alone, as suggested by other evaluations of workforce development programs.<sup>38</sup>

**Exhibit VIII-4: Average Program Costs by Type of Participant**

| <u>Participant Type</u>                | <u>Average Cost Per Participant</u> |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Training Participants (n = 512)        | \$2,242                             |
| Success Coach Participants (n = 2,092) | \$534                               |

Source: Michigan WIF grant expenditure reports from Upjohn.

Note: The total number of success coach participants was 2,092 whereas the unduplicated number of training participants was 512, which includes 201 in short-term classroom-based training, 170 OJT, and 141 jobseeker training participants).

<sup>37</sup> The exceptions to this general formula were that the costs of training for participants receiving success coach services were set to zero and the training costs for training participants were not weighted.

<sup>38</sup> Fortson, K., Rotz, D., Burkander, P., Mastri, A., Schochet, P., Rosenberg, L., McConnell, S., & D'Amico R. (2017). *Providing public workforce services to job seekers: 30-month impact findings on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.

## IX. Outcomes

---

This chapter focuses on three types of outcomes: system level, employer level, and participant level. System-level and employer-level analyses draw on interview data and an employer baseline and follow-up survey. In addition, information on increases in employer membership was gathered from qualitative interviews and a review of signed contracts with SWMERN-E member firms. (Other system-level outcomes, including improvements in the strength of partnerships and extent of coordination between SWMERN-E and the public workforce system, were discussed earlier in the report.)

At the participant level, the chapter draws on survey data to examine outcomes such as completion rates and satisfaction levels. Participant satisfaction levels were obtained from participant baseline survey responses. A follow-up participant survey was attempted but, because of low response rates, the data were not used, which means the research team was not able to answer all the originally proposed outcomes research questions. Participant completion rates were obtained from survey data and administrative records maintained by Upjohn.

In addition to the outcomes reported in this chapter, Upjohn reported grant performance outcomes to US DOL each quarter and cumulatively at the end of the grant period. For a complete picture of outcomes achieved through the grant, Upjohn's final performance outcomes report is presented in Appendix H. As noted in earlier chapters, survey methodology is included in Appendix A.

### Key Findings

- **The grant resulted in improved coordination between SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff.** Prior to the WIF grant, there was no coordination in business engagement activities and service delivery between the success coaches and MWSW BST staff. The grant helped to improve communication and coordination, which led to stronger employer engagement with the SWMERN-E and the public workforce system. This is a promising finding, given that most ERNs in Michigan (and throughout the country) are not administered by the public workforce system. Integrating outreach and recruitment and service delivery elements with the public workforce system provides an opportunity to better connect the ERN model with other organizations that are committed to helping businesses succeed and maintain a competitive advantage.
- **In its initial stages, the WIF grant provided resources to help engage employers about developing internal career pathways, which has the potential to improve employee retention strategies and prompt wage increases for incumbent workers.** While success coaches were not able to achieve all their desired goals in this area, the WIF grant helped improve the capacity of the success coaches and MWSW BST staff to work with businesses to discuss the value of career pathways and to support information-sharing events with employers.

- **There was an increase in the total number of new employer members added to the SWMERN-E during the grant period, as well as expansion in sectoral diversity.** However, the expansion was only achieved in one county, St. Joseph; no new members from Branch County were added during the grant period. With an additional 29 employers, the grant exceeded its goal of 25 new members.
- **Member survey responses from both new and existing firms showed that employers had positive attitudes towards the ERN model.** Most employer respondents reported they were either very satisfied or satisfied with SWMERN-E services, and that they planned to continue participating in the SWMERN after the WIF grant ended.
- **The participant survey findings suggest that the SWMERN-E initiative met its goal of training jobseekers for positions at ERN companies.** Nearly four in 10 jobseekers reported they were hired or were in the process of being hired by the employer sponsoring the training.
- **Most participants reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the training they received.** Similarly, three-quarters reported that the advice they received from a success coach helped them a lot. These results were consistently high across the grant period, suggesting that the initiative maintained high quality services throughout.

## System-Level Outcomes

As outlined in the logic model, the WIF grant was meant to achieve several system-level outcomes. It helped to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration between success coaches and MWSW BST professionals, as documented in detail in Chapters III and V of the report. The grant also provided valuable resources to improve the knowledge base of success coaches and MWSW BST professionals working with employers on career pathway development. Findings from interviews conducted over a four-year period from 2015 to 2018 suggest that system-level outcomes include the following:

- **The grant provided an opportunity to build a repertoire of business services that is stronger and better connected to the public workforce system.** Through a coordinated service-delivery approach for business engagement activities—including joint outreach and marketing efforts, coordination of incumbent worker training opportunities, and identification of job vacancies—SWMERN-E success coaches and MWSW BST staff worked collaboratively to connect employer members to public workforce system supports. By coordinating their outreach and recruitment activities, success coaches and BST professionals significantly increased the number of local businesses joining the SWMERN-E during the grant's period of performance. In addition, success coaches and MWSW BST staff received significant amounts of professional development, which can help ensure that staff are adequately trained to work in a coordinated and seamless fashion to address employers' needs in the local community.
- **MWSW BST staff developed a stronger understanding of individual business needs and provided services to meet those specific needs.** Having a seat at the table during SWMERN-E

meetings provided public workforce system professionals an opportunity to witness candid discussions about employers' individual and collective needs, some of which went beyond workforce. This helped success coaches and BST professionals look for ways to address employers' specific challenges and build the capacity of the public workforce system to innovate. To SWMERN-E members, the public workforce system was a maze of programs and funding sources with different eligibility criteria that seem arduous to learn. By building a stronger connection between SWMERN-E success coaches and BST professionals in the MWSW service centers, employers were able to learn about resources and supports with which they may not otherwise have been familiar.

For example, SWMERN-E members were concerned about a lack of public transportation to a large industrial park that is home to many businesses offering shift positions; they felt this would affect absenteeism rates and employers' struggles with filling open positions. After hearing this, MWSW BST staff and success coaches created an online survey that was distributed to member firms' incumbent workforce. The survey helped provide a clearer picture of transportation concerns, which led senior public workforce officials to engage with the city of Battle Creek about bus schedules.

- **The grant helped improve system-level engagement on career pathway development among success coaches, MWSW BST staff, and a core group of employers committed to improving employee retention.** While career pathway development was still in its infancy, SWMERN-E members received relevant training alongside their success coaches. This has the potential to lead to increased career mobility and wages for incumbent workers. Employers also benefited from the connection to local training providers—community colleges and other training vendors—to which they can turn for help developing internal career pathway training programs in the future, as needed.

## Employer-Level Outcomes

Regarding employer outcomes, there were two expansion goals for the SWMERN under the WIF grant: (1) increase the total number of members in the network by 25 new businesses, and (2) expand the service delivery model to two additional counties in Southwest Michigan's LWDA—Branch and St. Joseph. The initiative successfully increased its membership by 29 employers, and successfully expanded into St. Joseph County, but was still working on expanding into Branch County. These results are described in more detail below, along with a summary of employer perceptions of the services they received through the ERN.

## Membership Expansion Results

The study team collected information from Upjohn's US DOL quarterly progress reports and interviews with key program staff over four rounds of site visits. The original SWMERN had 10 members from Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties, and the goal was to raise the number of members by 25 and to add new businesses from Branch and St. Joseph Counties. (Appendix E contains a list of SWMERN-E employers, new and existing, and their counties of operation.) The following outcomes were achieved:

- **By the end of the grant period, the total number of employer members in the SWMERN-E had grown to 39 members.** This means that 29 new companies were added to the network during the grant period, exceeding the grant goal of 25 new members. There was, however, some attrition over the course of the three-year grant period. Ten members, five of whom were new members added during the grant period, left the SWMERN-E between April 1, 2016, and September 30, 2018, which represents a **total** SWMERN-E member retention rate of 74 percent. Although the grant goal of an 89 percent retention rate for **new** SWMERN-E members was not realized, the 83 percent that was achieved was very close. (See Exhibit IX-1 below for the calculations.)
- **Overall, 49 percent of ERN members (12 new businesses) were recruited from Kalamazoo County, compared to 41 percent (8 new businesses) from Calhoun County and 21 percent (8 new businesses) from St. Joseph County.** Most new employers added to the SWMERN-E came from the two largest counties with the most business establishments—Calhoun and Kalamazoo. Membership growth in St. Joseph County was also significant, with this county's membership growing from zero to eight members since the start of the grant. Despite multiple attempts, there were no new businesses added from Branch County, mainly due to the small employer base and the reluctance of employers in this county to engage with a new concept.

**Exhibit IX-1: SWMERN-E Total and New Member Retention Levels**

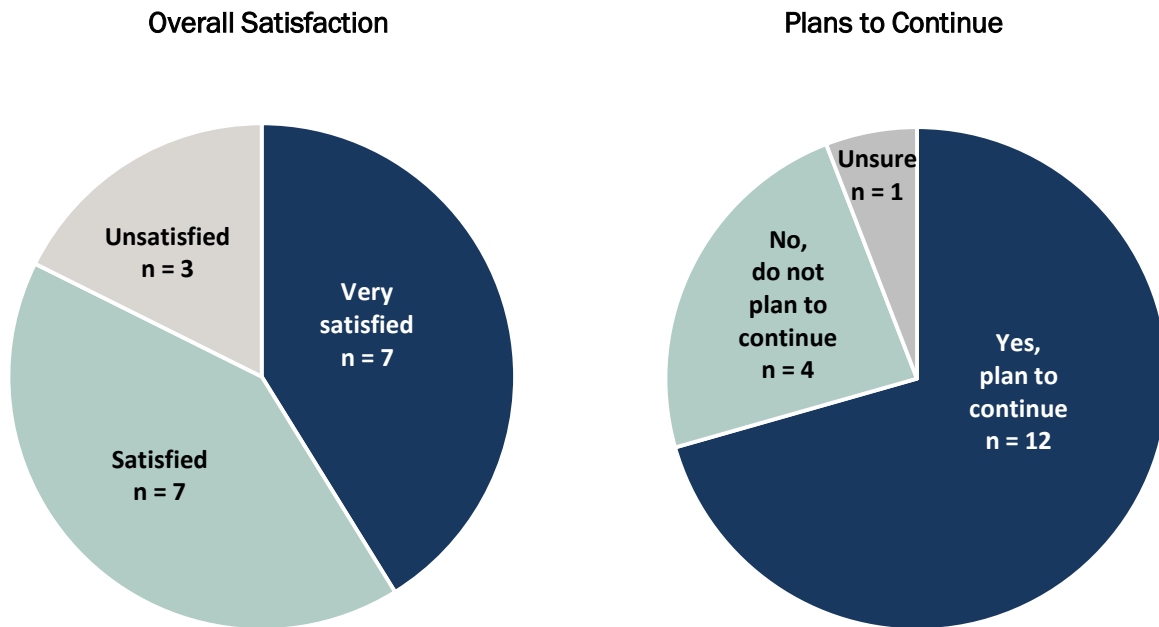
| Type of Retention Measure           | Calculation                                                                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Total</b> member retention rate: | $74\% = (39 \text{ members overall} - 10 \text{ who left}) \div 39$        |
| <b>New</b> member retention rate:   | $83\% = (29 \text{ new members} - 5 \text{ new members who left}) \div 29$ |

## SWMERN-E Members' Perceptions of Services

To assess the value of the services offered, member firms were surveyed one year after their date of entry into the SWMERN-E. This follow-up survey was sent to 29 members, and 17 responded—a 59 percent response rate. Because the following findings are based on such a small sample of employers, counts are reported rather than percentages.

Overall, 14 of the 17 employer respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the SWMERN-E, and 12 of 17 reported that they planned to continue their membership (see Exhibit IX-2).

**Exhibit IX-2: SWMERN-E Member Overall Satisfaction and  
Plans to Continue Participation  
(n = 17)**



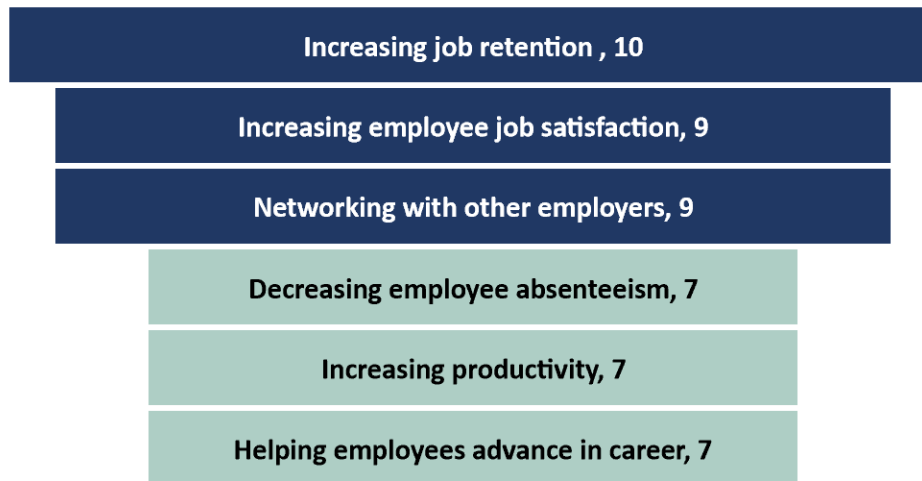
Source: SWMERN-E employer follow-up survey, 2016–2018.

***Perceived Benefits of SWMERN-E Participation***

Given that SWMERN-E membership was marketed to employers as a way to decrease employee absenteeism rates, it is notable that the survey results suggest that employers saw value in their membership and its ability to help them accomplish this goal. Just under half (seven of 17) reported that their membership benefited them in this way. An even higher number (10 out of 17) reported that their SWMERN-E membership benefited them by increasing job retention. (See Exhibit IX-3.)

Employer members also reported that SWMERN-E participation allowed them to increase employee job satisfaction (9 members) and network with other employers (9 members). In addition, seven employers each reported that participating in the SWMERN-E helped to increase worker productivity and assist employees in advancing in their careers.

**Exhibit IX-3: Perceived Benefits of Participating in the SWMERN-E  
(n = 17)**



Source: SWMERN-E employer follow-up survey, 2016–2018.

Of the 14 follow-up employer survey respondents who answered the question, nine reported that absenteeism among entry-level workers had not decreased since they joined the SWMERN-E; five said it had improved slightly. Moreover, 11 of the 14 stated that turnover among entry-level workers had not decreased, while the other three said it had decreased somewhat (see Exhibit IX-4). While the results only reflect the viewpoints of 14 companies, they suggest that employers are still struggling with ways to improve absenteeism and retention rates among entry-level workers, and that participation in the SWMERN-E alone was not sufficient to address this problem.

As success coaches explained in interviews, entry-level workers' reasons for leaving their employers sometimes have little to do with service interventions, such as those received from the success coaches. Rather, they have to do with the type of work they are performing, which in many cases is monotonous and low-paying. Thus, some workers will make employment changes for modest pay increases.

**Exhibit IX-4: Perceived Changes in Absenteeism and Turnover Levels Among  
Entry-Level Workers Since Joining SWMERN-E  
(n = 14)**



Source: SWMERN-E employer follow-up survey, 2016–2018.

Despite reports of low levels of change in turnover and absenteeism, 10 of 17 employer respondents reported that ERN membership provided a positive return on investment; another six stated that they were unsure, and one response was missing. Focus groups with member firms revealed that they appreciated the opportunity to hear encouraging stories from success coaches and to review data on SWMERN-E activities and services. However, a few members reported that it was difficult to draw a connection between what the success coaches did and improved outcomes, such as employee attendance, reduced staff turnover, and employee job satisfaction. As one manufacturing employer explained, “It’s hard to correlate it back, or really directly tie it back to our numbers, and what they are doing.”

The issue is complex, because success coaches may only be serving a fraction of a member’s total workforce. To balance out this concern, all ERNs, including those in Southwest Michigan, provide employers with countywide and employer-specific aggregate reports detailing service requests, services provided, and retention among workers served. Given that member firms are paying for a portion of the success coach’s time, it is important that they perceive value in providing these services to their incumbent workforce,

### ***Satisfaction with Success Coach Services***

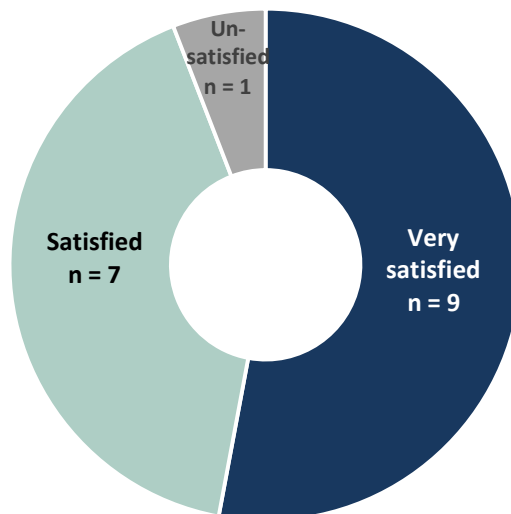
Looking at specific benefits of membership, employers who responded to the follow-up survey reported that success coach services provided significant value. Sixteen out of 17 reported that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their success coach (see Exhibit IX-5). Because success coaching was the preeminent component of the ERN model and service-delivery structure, employer satisfaction with this aspect is of paramount importance.

“The [success coach] we have, and maybe they’re all this wonderful, but the person that we have is really supportive, engaging, unassuming, [with a] kind personality that makes it really easy for people to talk with her.”

**SWMERN-E Member**

In interviews, employers reported being appreciative of having a success coach who was approachable and supportive in helping employees address work–life issues. Many members stated that a success coach had been proactive in bringing issues and concerns to management, to not only drive usage of the resources at their companies but also to help improve management–labor relations. One employer stated, “[The success coach] comes up with lots of great ideas and things, and some things we’ve been able to act on to help [our employees].” While members also valued the reduction in membership dues over the first year and the additional training supports, the data suggest that the success coach is what drove their perceptions of the value of SWMERN membership.

**Exhibit IX-5: SWMERN-E Member Satisfaction with Success Coaches**  
(n = 17)



Source: SWMERN-E employer follow-up survey, 2016–2018.

### ***Satisfaction with Incumbent Worker Training***

Another perceived value of SWMERN-E membership was access to incumbent worker training. As shown in Exhibit IX-6, 10 of 17 employer survey respondents reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with training provided to their workers, compared to four who said they were unsatisfied. This suggests that incumbent worker training was an asset that helped deliver the message to member firms that being part of the network was valuable.

Several employer members interviewed for the study stated that the WIF funding helped them to identify and provide needed training to their existing workforce. “I saw a lot of value in the leadership academy training,” commented one SWMERN-E member. This was especially true among smaller SWMERN-E firms that had fewer resources for incumbent worker training than the larger firms did. As discussed in Chapter III, another benefit of the expanded SWMERN was its ability to work closely with the public workforce system to share information about other state- and federally-sponsored training programs focused on incumbent worker and career pathways opportunities.

### Exhibit IX-6: SWMERN-E Member Satisfaction with Incumbent Worker Training (n = 17)



Source: SWMERN-E employer follow-up survey, 2016–2018.

### ***Additional Benefits of SWMERN-E Participation***

During interviews, employers reported several additional benefits of their membership. Common themes from the qualitative analysis included:

- **Employees felt valued by their employers.** According to one employer, “We’ve seen from our employees that [they know] we care. I think it emphasizes the fact that we try to create a family environment so that we really care about our employees....We care about you while you’re at work [and] at home, and [help] you to grow and succeed overall.” Some SWMERN-E members stated that having the success coach on site to assist employees—instead of using an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) managed by an offsite telephone assistance provider—was beneficial in showing employees that the company was focused on their needs and was willing to assist them with addressing non-work-related issues. Focus groups with employees underscored this notion, with several participants reporting that onsite success coach services helped them address problems immediately. They particularly valued

“And the EAP felt a little—it’s just not as personal as having [a success coach]—it’s a 1-800 number that they call.”

**SWMERN-E Employer**

“Because it supports the culture we’re continuing and trying to develop here, to have help for employees, not just for work-related things but for things for outside, that in turn is going to affect our attendance and our turnover....It’s valuable having someone not in [our company’s] human resource department that people can talk to. Even though we’re confidential, there’s a lot of mistrust everywhere you go. And they may not want to sit down and tell us what really is going on, where they’re more willing to do it with somebody that’s not an employee, that has resources that they can send them out to.”

**SWMERN-E Employer**

having the service available to them while at work because the success coach would follow up with them in person.

- **Membership reduced the workload of HR divisions.** Another benefit perceived by SWMERN-E members was that HR departments, which in many cases were quite small, had more time to focus on recruiting new employees, conduct new employee orientations, and assisting with benefits administration, instead of focusing on non-work-related issues. One employer stated, “We’ve seen...a reduced load on our human resources team, so they can make that connection with a success coach, get the employee the resources they need, and then focus again on their own job.”
- **Employers valued the opportunity to network with other businesses.** Several SWMERN-E members commented that ERN meetings provided an opportunity to network with other employers, which was valuable in creating partnerships that served their workers. For example, as a result of increased familiarity with one another, a few SWMERN-E members coordinated food truck events and community blood drives. One employer stated, “I think it’s been a benefit to network with the other employers....While we had a little bit of a connection there, we now have a bigger connection [with employers in our area].”

Several SWMERN-E members noted that a particular benefit of joining during the WIF grant was the ability to obtain a 50-percent reduction in membership fees during the first year of participation. Most employers felt that if their membership resulted in one or two employees remaining with their company, it would be well worth the cost. As one employer noted, “If we save one or two employees, that’s gonna be an impact to us, in my eyes.” Most members valued the relationship with their success coach and felt that those with a high level of interaction with the employer helped drive positive member perceptions of the SWMERN-E.

## Participant Outcomes and Perceived Benefits

Similar to the employer survey results, jobseekers and incumbent workers receiving services through the WIF grant were generally satisfied with the training services and success coach services they received during the grant period. Many jobseekers reported they had been hired or were in the process of being hired by the employer that sponsored their training, and the majority reported completing their training programs. The remainder of this section describes these results in more detail.

### *Jobseeker Outcomes at Exit and Perceptions of Services Received*

A total of 141 jobseekers received training through the WIF grant,<sup>39</sup> and 102 of them responded to a survey designed to learn about their satisfaction with the training, completion status, and post-program employment.<sup>40</sup> Surveys were distributed in class, and the response rate was 100 percent.

---

<sup>39</sup> In its final performance report to US DOL, Upjohn reported that 247 jobseekers received training. In fact, they reported 106 people twice—once for enrollment in essential skills training and once for enrollment in technical skills training. SPR is reporting the unduplicated total of 141 (247 – 106 = 141).

<sup>40</sup> Not all jobseeker training participants were surveyed because surveying ended in June 2018 to meet final evaluation report deadlines and, in some cases, because of coordination challenges (see Appendix A).

Most of the 102 jobseeker survey respondents were either very satisfied (80 percent) or satisfied (12 percent) with the training they received (see Exhibit IX-7). Consistently high satisfaction levels over the grant period suggest that jobseeker training remained at high quality levels from the early implementation stage to the later stages of the initiative. This result is not shown in the exhibit but is available on request.<sup>41</sup>

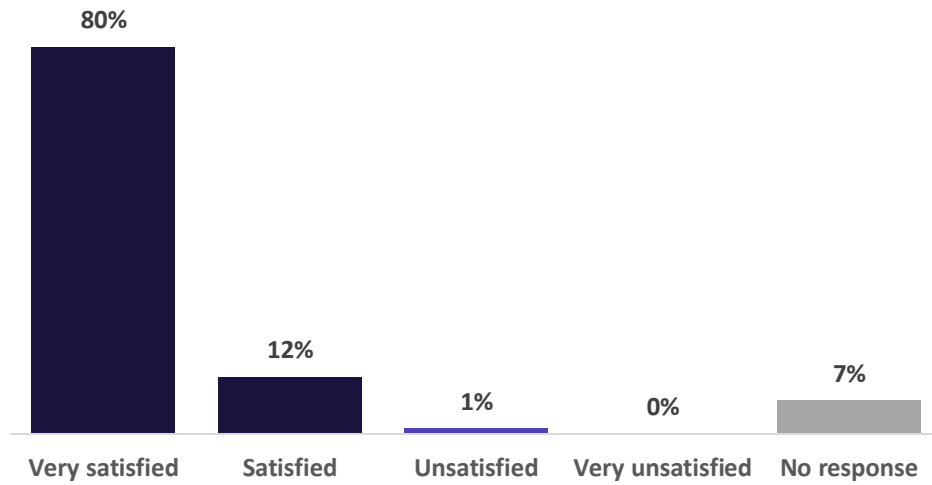
High levels of satisfaction were also consistent across different training types, with the exception of culinary training, where 64 percent (seven of 11) were very satisfied, and one-third (four of 11) did not respond to the question. Although survey respondents did not explain why they were not satisfied with the culinary training, participant feedback suggests that the culinary program was primarily set up to train individuals to serve as lead or associate-level chefs in restaurants, whereas SWMERN-E employers needed training for entry-level food service staff at locations such as nursing homes and hospitals. Thus, the culinary training program was not considered to be the best fit. Appendix I includes a table depicting how satisfaction varied by training type.

Twenty of the 102 survey respondents provided additional detail about their satisfaction levels. Respondents reported being satisfied because they felt that they learned something, and they appreciated the instructors. A few appreciated learning both occupational and soft skills, as one respondent in the CNC operator training described: “This program put all the pieces together to make me be successful—training, transportation, self-esteem building.” In line with satisfaction levels, when asked to indicate on a scale of zero to 10 (with 10 being the highest rating) how likely they would be to recommend the training to a coworker, 85 percent chose a rating of 8 or higher.

---

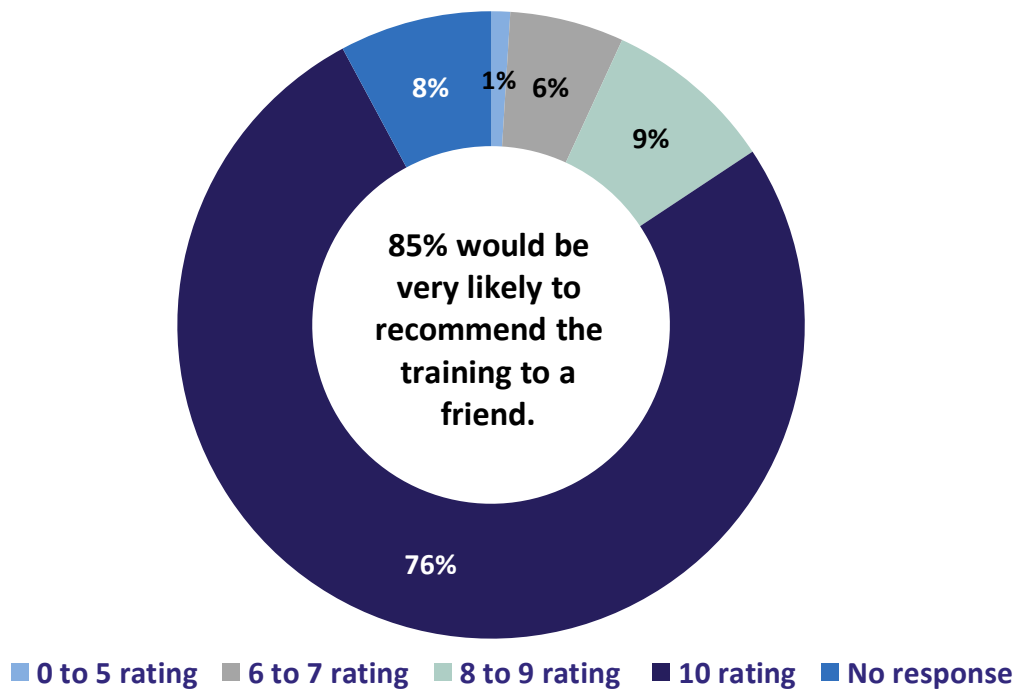
<sup>41</sup> We conducted chi-square tests to examine how the results varied over the grant period (2016, 2017, 2018) and found no significant variation by year. For some response categories there were fewer than five responses, so the chi-square tests were not reliable. Therefore, where feasible, we conducted a chi-square test on collapsed categories. For example, on the question that asked respondents about likelihood on a scale of zero to 10, we created smaller groups (0–5, 6–8, and 9–10). Even after collapsing responses, some cells had fewer than five responses, so the chi-square tests were not reliable.

Exhibit IX-7: Jobseeker Satisfaction with Training  
(n = 102)



Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey, 2016–2018.

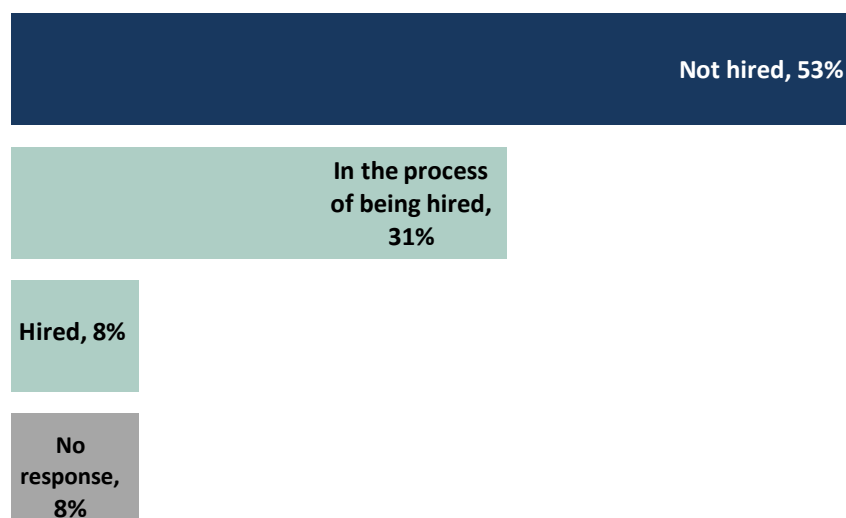
Exhibit IX-8: How likely are you to recommend the training to a friend?  
Scale: 0–10  
(n = 102)



Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey, 2016–2018.

On surveys, most participants also indicated that they had achieved training and employment milestones. Specifically, nearly all survey respondents (96 percent) reported that they completed the training program.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, administrative records maintained by the grant administrative team indicate that 96 percent of participants completed training.<sup>43</sup> Thirty-nine percent of jobseeker participants reported that they *had been hired* (eight of 102 jobseeker participants) or were *in the process of being hired* (32 of 102 jobseeker participants) by the SWMERN-E employer that sponsored the training (8 percent and 31 percent, respectively), which was one of the primary goals of the SWMERN-E model (see Exhibit IX-9). The vast majority (88 percent) of these new-hire training participants participated in the CNC Operator (n=9) or Production Technician training (n=19), which were both in high demand among advanced manufacturing companies.

**Exhibit IX-9: Jobseeker Participant Employment Status with Employer that Sponsored the Training<sup>44</sup>**  
(n = 102)



Source: Jobseeker training baseline survey, 2016–2018.

## ***Incumbent Worker Perceptions of Services Received***

Incumbent workers were another participant group that received services through the WIF grant. They received these services in two primary ways—short-term classroom training or OJT and meetings

<sup>42</sup> Among the remaining responses, three indicated they did not complete because they were completing the survey during the last week of class; one respondent did not answer the question.

<sup>43</sup> Seventeen of the 159 completed only the soft-skills portion of their training program.

<sup>44</sup> This is a lower bound estimate of the number of jobseekers hired by SWMERN-E members because it is based on survey responses, which includes 72 percent of the 141 jobseeker participants. Appendix A explains the reasons not all jobseeker participants were surveyed. Also, because the survey was administered to jobseekers during the last week of their training program not all survey respondents could confirm being hired, rather they could only report they were in the process of being hired by a SWMERN-E member.

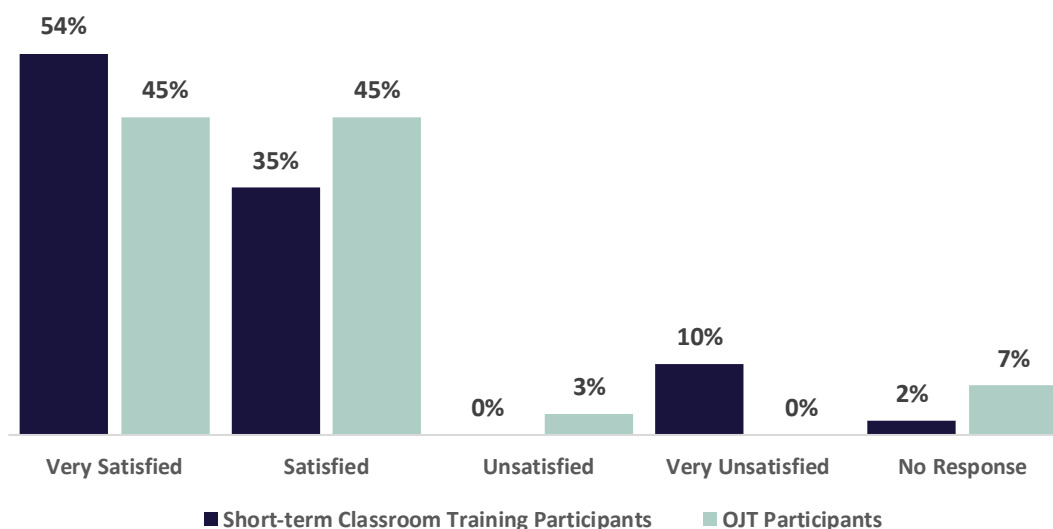
with success coaches. They were generally satisfied with the services they received during the grant period, as described in this section.

### Training Services

As described in Chapter VI, 201 SWMERN-E employees received short-term classroom training, and 170 received OJT to help support their career advancement. A subset of these participants were surveyed to learn about their satisfaction with and completion of the training.<sup>45</sup> The response rates were 91 percent for the short-term classroom training group and 31 percent for the OJT group. The response rate was higher for short-term classroom training because the survey was mostly administered in class during the last week of the training, while the majority in OJT received the survey by email.

As shown in Exhibit IX-10, the majority of survey respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the training they received (90 percent of the OJT group; 89 percent of the short-term classroom training group). There was no detectable variation in these results in the two years for which incumbent worker training was supported by the WIF grant (2017 and 2018), suggesting that it was maintained at high quality levels throughout the grant period.<sup>46</sup>

**Exhibit IX-10: Satisfaction with Training by Group**  
(n = 152)



Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2017–2018.

Notes: The number of short-term classroom training respondents is 123; the number of OJT respondents is 29.

<sup>45</sup> About two-thirds of those who received short-term training were surveyed, and half of those who received OJT were surveyed. Not all training participants were surveyed because survey administration ended in June 2018 for both classroom training and OJT in order to meet final evaluation report deadlines. Additionally, some training participants were not surveyed due to coordination difficulties.

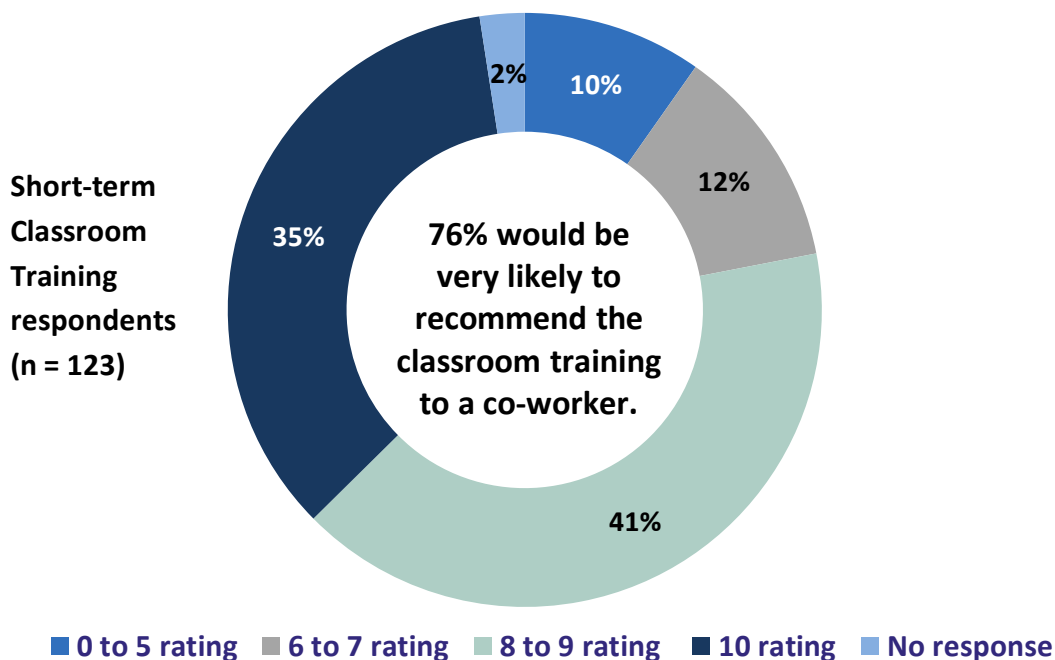
<sup>46</sup> We conducted chi-square tests to examine how the results varied over time (i.e., 2017 vs. 2018) and found no significant variation by year. We did this for all training respondents (not separately for OJT and short-term classroom training) to account for the small number of observations in response categories. Still, for some response categories the number of responses was less than five, so the chi-square tests were not reliable. Therefore, where feasible, we conducted a chi-square test on collapsed categories. For example, on the question that asked respondents about likelihood on a scale of zero to 10, we created smaller groups (0–5, 6–8, and 9–10). Even after collapsing responses, some cells had fewer than five responses, so the chi-square tests were not reliable.

About one-fifth of survey respondents elaborated on their responses. The main reasons they were satisfied were that they learned something and/or they thought the instructor did a good job. Those who were dissatisfied most often said the information was not relevant to their job or they already knew the content being taught.

Similar to satisfaction levels, the majority of survey respondents said they would recommend the training in which they participated to a coworker. As depicted in Exhibit IX-11, 76 percent of short-term classroom training survey respondents rated the likelihood of recommending the training to a friend between 8 and 10 (with 10 again being the highest rating). Nearly as many (73 percent) of OJT respondents provided the same rating (Exhibit IX-12). These results were consistent from 2017 to 2018.

One notable variation occurred in the proportion of respondents rating the likelihood at 10 (the highest on the scale). While 52 percent of the OJT respondents ranked the likelihood that they would recommend the training to a coworker at 10, just 35 percent of the short-term classroom training respondents did so.<sup>47</sup> One possible reason for the difference is that most short-term classroom training was specialized—that is, leadership training preparing employees for management positions—which may not have been applicable to all of the employees' coworkers.

**Exhibit IX-11: How likely are you to recommend the training to a coworker?**  
Scale: 0–10

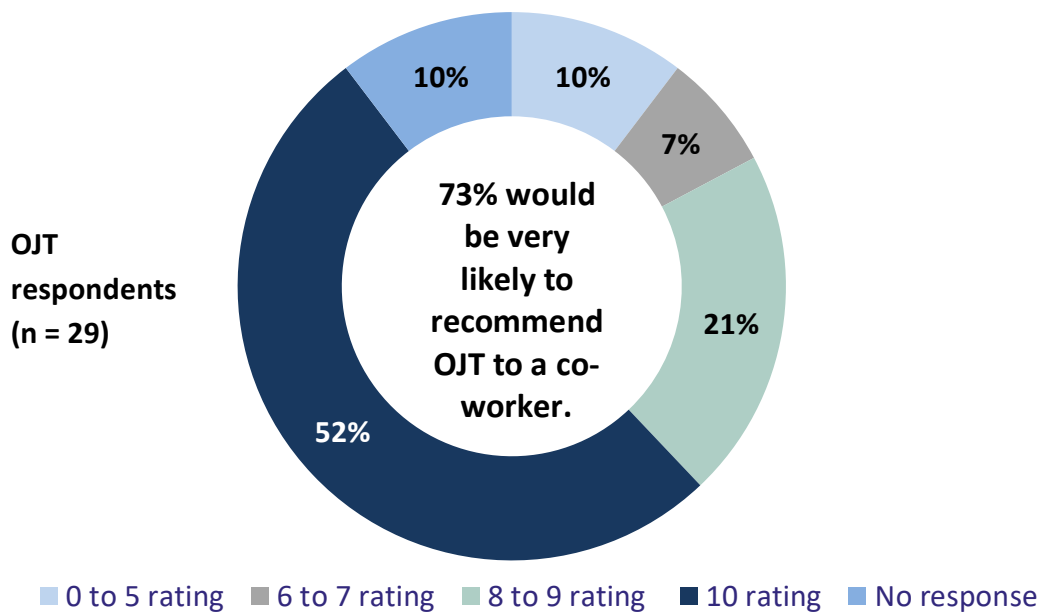


Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2016–2018.

Notes: “Very likely” is defined as a rating from 8 to 10.

<sup>47</sup> A t-test of the average rating indicates no significant different between the OJT and short-term classroom training groups. However, a t-test shows borderline statistical significance between the portion of OJT respondents choosing 10 (52 percent) and short-term classroom training respondents choosing 10 (35 percent), with a p-value of .11.

**Exhibit IX-12: How likely are you to recommend the training to a coworker?**  
Scale: 0–10

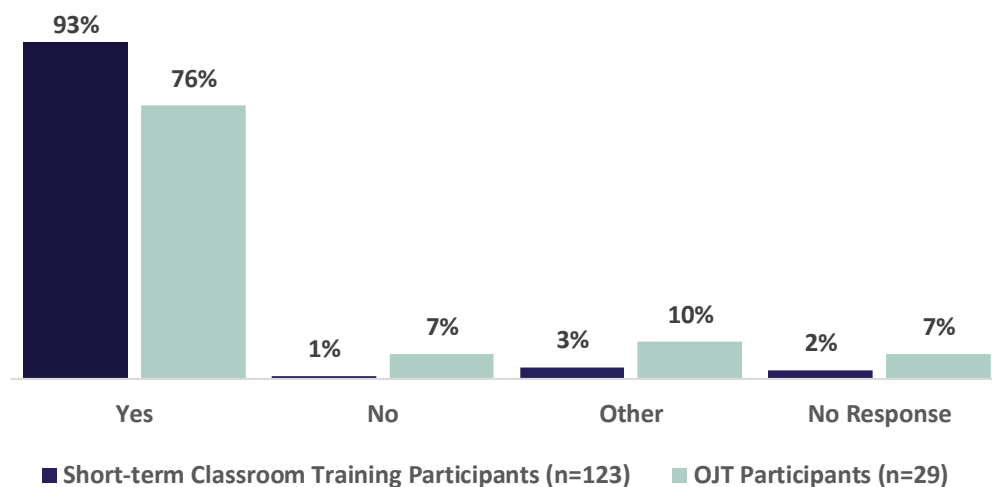


Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2016–2018.

Notes: The number of short-term classroom training respondents is 123; the number of OJT survey respondents is 29.

As shown in Exhibit IX-13, most survey respondents also reported completing their training. The rate was lower for the OJT group (76 percent) than for the short-term training group (93 percent), in part because 10 percent of those in OJT (three of 29) were still enrolled in the training at the time they completed the survey.

**Exhibit IX-13: Incumbent Worker Self-Reported Short-Term Training and OJT Completion**  
(n = 152)



Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2016–2018.

The completion rates reported on the survey were similar to those obtained from administrative records maintained by program staff. In administrative records, 98 percent of short-term classroom training participants completed their training, and 81 percent of OJT participants did so (Exhibit IX-14).

**Exhibit IX-14: Incumbent Worker Training Completion Rates**  
(n = 371)

| <u>Group</u>                                                | <u>Enrolled</u> | <u>Completed</u> | <u>Completion Rate</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Short-term occupational skills training participants</b> | 201             | 196              | 98%                    |
| <b>OJT participants</b>                                     | 170             | 137              | 81%                    |
| <b>Total</b>                                                | <b>371</b>      | <b>333</b>       | <b>90%</b>             |

Source: Upjohn administrative records, 2018.

### Success Coach Services

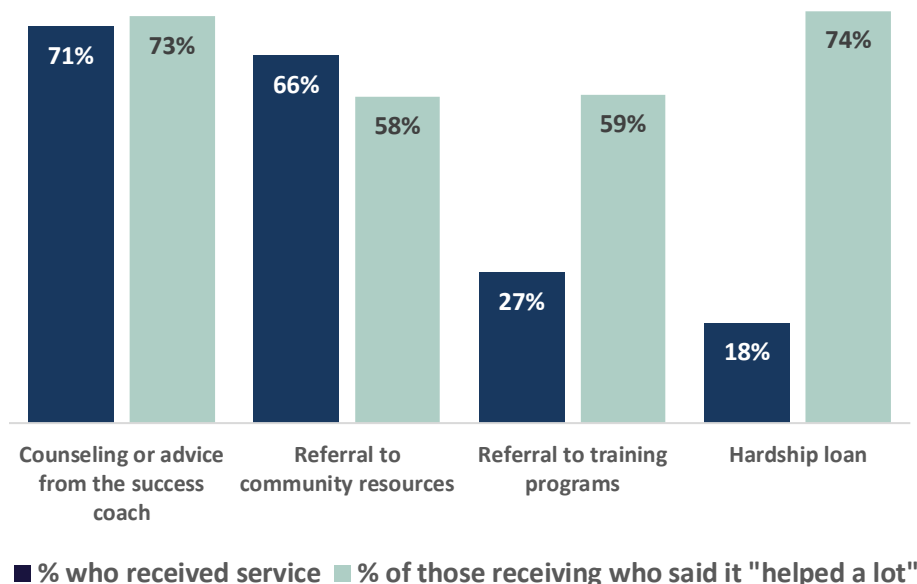
In addition to accessing training services, employees at SWMERN-E companies could meet with success coaches at their employer sites. Of the 2,092 workers who received success coach services between April 1, 2016, and September 30, 2018, approximately 20 percent responded to the baseline survey (n =424).

As indicated in Exhibit IX-15, many incumbent worker survey respondents (58 to 74 percent, depending on the service) reported that the success coach services they received were helpful.

The most common service was receiving advice from a success coach (71 percent of respondents), and 73 percent of these respondents indicated the service helped a lot. The next most common service (reported by 66 percent) was receipt of a referral to a community resource; 58 percent reported that it helped a lot.

Training programs and hardship loans were utilized less often but were viewed as helpful by those who did access them. Specifically, 27 percent connected with a training program they were referred to, and 60 percent of them said it helped a lot. Nearly one in five respondents (18 percent) received hardship loan funding, and 74 percent of these individuals reported that it helped a lot.

**Exhibit IX-15: Incumbent Worker Success Coach Service Receipt and Satisfaction Rates  
(n = 424)**



Source: Success coach participant survey, 2016–2018.

Notes: The denominator for “% of those receiving who said it ‘helped a lot’” varies by service: n = 301 for counseling or advice from the success coach; n = 279 for referral to community resources; n = 114 for referral to training programs; n = 76 for hardship loans.

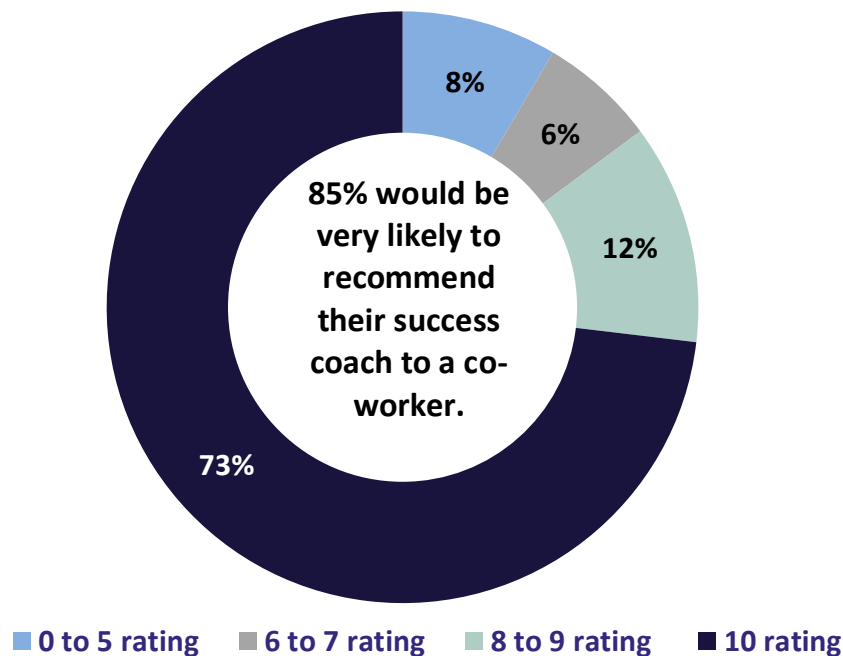
Similar to the strong indications of helpfulness, nearly three-fourths of respondents indicated that they would recommend success coaching services to others. As shown in Exhibit IX-16, 73 percent of respondents indicated that their likelihood of recommending their success coach to a coworker was 10 on a scale of zero to 10; another 12 percent chose a rating of 8 or 9. Only 8 percent of respondents rated their likelihood of referring success coaching to others to be 5 or less. These results were consistent across the grant period (2016 to 2018), indicating that success coach services were valued by incumbent employees at high levels throughout.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> We conducted chi-square tests to examine how the results varied over the grant period (2016, 2017, 2018) and found no significant variation by year. For some response categories there were fewer than five responses, so the chi-square tests were not reliable. Therefore, where feasible, we conducted a chi-square test on collapsed categories. For example, on the question that asked respondents about likelihood on a scale of zero to 10, we created smaller groups (0–5, 6–8, and 9–10). Even after collapsing responses, some cells had fewer than five responses, so the chi-square tests were not reliable.

### Exhibit IX-16 How likely are you to recommend your success coach to a coworker?

Scale: 0–10

(n = 425)



Source: Success coach participant survey, 2016–2018.

Notes: “Very likely” is defined as a rating from 8 to 10.

## Summary

The findings in this chapter are consistent with the implementation findings described in previous chapters in several ways. As described in earlier chapters, at the system level, the SWMERN-E initiative strengthened the partnership between success coaches and MWSW BST staff because the two sets of staff coordinated their business engagement activities. Through this coordination, the staff increased the number of employers joining the SWMERN during the grant period.

At the employer level, employers were satisfied with their success coaches and the services offered to their workforce. Employer survey results showed they had high levels of satisfaction with SWMERN-E membership and most said they would renew their membership—two positive signs that employers valued their participation in the SWMERN-E. Additionally, findings from the jobseeker training survey indicated that the SWMERN-E initiative met its goal of helping employer members recruit and train new hires, with about one-third of jobseeker training participants being hired by an employer sponsoring the training. Of course, as noted in Chapter IV, there were two major challenges: Although multiple potential relationships were developed, the administrative team was unable to recruit any employers from Branch County during the grant implementation period. Staff continue to build those relationships in order to continue the growth in members.

Employee and jobseeker participants were also satisfied with training received through the grant. Findings from the participant survey indicate high levels of satisfaction throughout the life of the grant, which suggests the service quality was maintained. Participant survey findings could not be used to assess the job advancement of training participants or success coach participants because response rates were very low (approximately four percent), making the data unreliable.

## X. Conclusion

---

This final chapter seeks to draw conclusions about the implementation of the SWMERN-E project and to explore the significance of the study's findings. It discusses the overall implementation successes achieved by the program and its key players, as well as the challenges encountered while implementing the grant. The chapter also draws out lessons learned during implementation, focusing on how these lessons may apply to the development of other programs similar to the SWMERN-E. The chapter reviews efforts to sustain and replicate the model and discusses how practitioners and policymakers might use the model and the study's findings to replicate it. Finally, it addresses the implications of these findings for future efforts and research focused on employer engagement and retention services, which now have added significance, given recent changes in workforce legislation and high demand for skilled labor among U.S. employers.

### Summary of Grant Goals and Achievements

As proposed, the WIF-funded innovation was designed to build on the existing SWMERN, expanding its reach and the services offered to member businesses, incumbent workers, and jobseekers. The WIF grant worked to expand the ERN model in Southwest Michigan in five key areas:

- **Geographic expansion and increase in membership.** The SWMERN encompassed Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties. Under the expansion, the administrative team worked to broaden its geographic service area to include Branch and St. Joseph Counties. The original SWMERN comprised 10 members, and the grant worked to increase membership by 25 new employers. While the latter goal was achieved, with the number of new employer members increasing by 29, the geographic expansion into two new counties was not: Administrative staff were successful expanding into St. Joseph County, but not Branch County. Administrative staff generated a great deal of interest among Branch County employers, but this did not translate into actual membership commitments during the grant period.
- **Recruitment of eligible jobseekers.** The existing SWMERN had not addressed employers' difficulties recruiting skilled workers, so, under the expansion, project staff worked to help member firms fill job vacancies. While the success coaches actively worked with member firms to identify their hiring needs, members ultimately decided that this was not an area for which they turned to SWMERN-E success coaches. Rather, employers used existing public workforce system supports—like the state job bank, sponsored job fairs, employment agencies, online job-search websites, and other means—to recruit talent. So, within the first two years of implementation, success coaches spent less time working to fill member firms' job vacancies, instead making referrals back to MWSW BST professionals and partner staff to address this area, as needed.
- **Training of screened jobseekers.** Under the original SWMERN, jobseeker training was not a core service component and was not part of the service delivery components offered by success coaches. Through contracts with training providers, the SWMERN-E provided both soft and technical skills training to job candidates and worked with SWMERN-E members to refer training completers to member firms for employment. Member firms also worked with MWSW and the success coaches to identify entry-level job opportunities and the skills

needed to fill these positions, which helped the administrative team target the types of training opportunities funded under the grant. Initially, it was anticipated that all jobseeker training candidates would be prescreened by SWMERN-E members. This did not occur, however, because it was logistically difficult for grant staff to coordinate, and SWMERN-E members did not have time to assist. In limited instances, member firms participated in training-vendor graduations and hired some training completers. In addition, some new hires received OJT supported by the WIF grant with member firms.

- **Articulated career pathways.** The original vision was that, under the expansion, 100 percent of SWMERN-E members would receive assistance in developing career pathways. The vision was that SWMERN-E members would promote employees from within their own companies and would work collectively to develop industry-specific career pathways. Instead, the administrative team realized that success coaches and MWSW BST staff responsible for working with employers to develop career pathways did not have the content expertise to engage employers. Thus, grant funds helped to increase the capacity of success coaches and MWSW BST staff to assist members in this area. The professional development provided was set up in a train-the-trainer format so that success coaches would in turn be able to use the content with member firms. Grant staff hosted several training events with subject matter experts to allow member firms to explore the notion of developing internal career pathways and support a “grow your own” model within their companies. This was one of the last areas implemented by the administrative team, so progress was much slower here; many employers needed time to embrace the idea and work internally to identify jobs as well as required KSAs for specific career paths.
- **Incorporation of the public workforce system.** Typically, ERNs have hired success coaches through the Department of Health and Human Services and related program partners in order to support the many employees who are also recipients of public assistance. Under the grant, all the SWMERN-E success coaches became employees of Upjohn, which is also the administrative entity for the public workforce system locally. The grant was also set up to create a stronger connection between MWSW BST professionals and success coaches; indeed, the level of communication, information sharing, and resource allocation between them improved dramatically under the grant.

## Implementation Successes and Promising Practices

Through the WIF grant, the administrative team was able to achieve many of the grant’s goals, which included expanding the size and geographic scope of the SWMERN, improving its integration and coordination with the public workforce system, providing opportunities for skills development among jobseekers and incumbent workers, and filling job openings within member firms. This section provides a brief summary of implementation successes and promising practices.

- **The grant helped increase the capacity of success coaches to assist employers and incumbent workers by providing an abundance of professional development opportunities for new and existing staff.** Success coaches received professional development on an array of topics, which included successful strategies for engaging the business community, workplace stability awareness, career pathway development for businesses and jobseekers, and goal

setting strategies for individuals. The majority of employers surveyed (16 of 17) reported that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their success coaches, which is paramount, given that the model is structured on a set of success coaching services.

- **The grant allowed the administrative team to facilitate the delivery of success coaching services to a wider network of employers.** They were able to increase the number of success coaches from two to five over the course of the grant period.
- **Success coaches' engagement with the public workforce system grew under the grant.** MWSW BST staff and the success coaches developed a collaborative relationship that involved sharing expertise, information, and resources with one another. Bringing the MWSW BST professionals on board helped West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches increase their business outreach and marketing strategies, which significantly improved membership levels and employer engagement in Southwest Michigan.
- **The ability of Upjohn staff to work alongside the creator of the ERN model, West Michigan TEAM, helped ensure the model was marketed appropriately to the local business community.** West Michigan TEAM staff had worked to implement ERNs in Arizona, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Texas. Thus, they had extensive experience in establishing and implementing the model to meet the needs of the employer communities they were meant to serve.
- **An important strategy for increasing employer membership in the SWMERN-E was using WIF grant funding to pay for 50 percent of employers' first-year membership dues.** With the cost of first-year membership offset, new employer members had time to assess the value of the network before deciding whether to pay the full dues for the second year. This not only helped employers to see the value of the model in action, but also gave the ERN administrator and success coaches time to bring employers on board.
- **Upjohn leveraged significant amounts of resources to support SWMERN-E implementation.** The primary leveraged funding came from SWMERN-E member dues, which helped to offset the costs of success coaches; additional funding came from other partner organizations (i.e., MDHHS and MRS), which helped defray training costs and augment supportive services to program participants.
- **The WIF-funded grant made short-term classroom training and OJT available to incumbent workers.** Incumbent worker training, including leadership, supervisory, and occupational skills training, had not been part of the original SWMERN service model, but was popular with both member firms and incumbent workers. Both respondent groups surveyed—employers and incumbent workers—found value in the short-term classroom training and OJT opportunities. These data suggest that offering incumbent worker training to member firms was valuable and helped communicate the value of being part of the network.
- **The SWMERN-E project helped increase member companies' understanding of career pathway development as a retention and advancement strategy** by offering information and training sessions on creating these pathways. Success coaching services became more oriented toward career pathways, as coaches assessed participants' career interests and

used new tools, like Goal4 It!<sup>®</sup>, to help workers create long-term employment and advancement goals.

## Implementation Challenges

The evaluation revealed several challenges that Upjohn and its contractors encountered in designing and operating the SWMERN-E. In many but not all cases, the grant administrative team was able to overcome these challenges by developing new strategies and adapting their approaches to service delivery. Understanding these challenges, as well as their causes and consequences, may help the SWMERN-E and others wishing to implement similar programs avoid pitfalls in future efforts.

- **Despite efforts to help retain entry-level, hourly workers, employee turnover did not appear to decrease.** While survey responses tell a very positive story about the value of success coaching to the individuals who received it, persistently high rates of turnover led some employers to question the value of the coaching services for the company. In this respect, there are some limits to the ERN model itself. For example, success coaches reported that many employees who left their jobs did so for a modest pay increase at another firm. Thus, while success coaches can work diligently to address workplace stability and offer referrals to outside partner programs for supports that may affect absenteeism and retention, employers must ultimately take a closer look at what additional investments they could make in entry-level workers to provide better, livable wages to their workers.<sup>49</sup>
- **Maintaining employer involvement in the SWMERN-E at the grant's conclusion proved challenging for success coaches and the administrative team.** The WIF grant allowed Upjohn and MWSW staff to expand the ERN model to include additional supports for member firms through incumbent worker and jobseeker training programs, which helped draw more employers into the network. West Michigan TEAM and the success coaches stated that workplace stability supports through success coaching drew employers into joining the SWMERN, as other supports were more dependent on fluctuating external funding sources.

Given that member firms valued the incumbent worker training component, however, future iterations of the model may want to incorporate it as a core component in addition to success coaching services. This may require administrators to increase membership dues to offset related costs and to possibly look at other state models that maximize resources by pooling funding for industrywide training, rather than employer-specific training programs. An example of this is California's Employment Training Panel (ETP), an agency that provides approximately \$80 million a year to support incumbent worker training. A large part of ETP's funding is channeled through its multiple employer contracts, whereby a third party—typically an industry association, community college, labor organization, workforce board, or similar intermediary—receives a master contract it can administer to multiple employers in smaller amounts.

---

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, West Michigan Team collected data on retention of incumbent workers who met with a success coach and their data showed high rates of employee retention for these individuals.

In previous work, SPR has found that this type of arrangement, which is similar to the expanded incumbent worker training services offered by the SWMERN-E, helps employers retain and motivate their workforce, establish or update internal HR training systems, and stay competitive by keeping their employees updated on the latest technologies.<sup>50</sup> Another example is Pennsylvania's Next Generation Industry Partnerships, a sector strategy to coordinate and align workforce, education, economic development, and other public and community partners to support an industry through coordinated training programs and services.<sup>51</sup>

- **Helping SWMERN-E members develop internal career pathways proved challenging, as program staff initially lacked the expertise to assist employers in this area.** This required additional professional development for program staff. In addition, many employers did not have the necessary internal capacity—time, staff, or other resources—to develop career pathways for their incumbent workforce. In addition, according to some member firms, many community and technical colleges—core providers of occupational skills training—adapt more slowly to evolving employer needs due to their accreditation and curriculum-approval processes. Further, while SWMERN-E members increased their use of OJT for new hires during the grant period, many had not yet taken up the possibility of OJT for incumbent worker career advancement.
- **Tracking the outcomes of success coaching services proved challenging.** Once their issues were addressed, many incumbent workers did not reconnect with their success coaches (unless other needs arose), which made it challenging for coaches to collect data on outcomes of interest to the grant, such as employment, retention, promotions, and wage gains.

## Sustainability and Replicability of the ERN Model

The WIF program manager, success coaches, and West Michigan TEAM staff believed that the SWMERN would continue after the WIF grant expired. Some program and service components, however, will likely not be sustained. These include:

- Covering 50 percent of employers' first-year membership dues;
- Covering 100 percent of incumbent workers' soft skills and occupational skills training costs;
- Providing supportive services to incumbent workers directly from grant funds rather than from partner programs; and
- Covering 100 percent of jobseeker soft skills and occupational skills training.

---

<sup>50</sup> Goger, A. et al. (2018). *State of California employment training panel: program assessment*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates (Obtained from State of California).

<sup>51</sup> See <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Businesses/Workforce-Development/Pages/Industry-Partnerships.aspx> for additional information on Pennsylvania's Next Generation Industry Partnership program and

While WIF funding for training is no longer available, the state of Michigan has other initiatives in place that could be accessed for this purpose—for example, its *GoingPRO in Michigan* occupational skills training fund and other programs that reimburse employers for incumbent worker training costs. These funds could potentially offset the loss of WIF funding to support member firms. Most of these programs are competitively procured, however, so funding is not guaranteed the way it was for member firms under the SWMERN-E project.

That said, the grant’s administrative team was pleased with many aspects of the SWMERN-E initiative and was planning ways to sustain some components. For example, Upjohn has assumed the role of SWMERN administrator, a role originally handled by West Michigan TEAM, and has become the employer of record for the success coaches. These changes should help ensure that the SWMERN will continue to be connected with other workforce development efforts in the local area. As part of taking over as SWMERN administrator, Upjohn planned to have all the SWMERN-E success coaches certified as Business Solutions Professionals by the third quarter of 2019. The grant administrative team also created several new systemwide partnerships, such as between the success coaches and MWSW BST professionals, and these are likely to endure as well.

In late 2018, as the WIF evaluation was underway, the state of Michigan decided to use some of its state WIOA set-aside funds to encourage LWDAs to develop Business Resource Networks, or BRNs. These BRNs follow the same model as ERNs—in Michigan and throughout the country—but do not coordinate administrative elements of their operations through West Michigan TEAM. All BRNs are operated by the local Michigan Works! agency, but not all ERNs in Michigan have the Michigan Works! agency serving as the administrative entity. Southwest Michigan made a strategic decision to keep its affiliation as an ERN, rather than a BRN, because Upjohn executives and administrative staff recognized the value of West Michigan TEAM (now ERN USA) in providing technical assistance, success coach training, and assistance with reporting functions. The fact that the state of Michigan is now encouraging LWDAs to create these employer networks suggests both the popularity of the ERN model and its replicability nationwide. It is worth noting, however, that ERNs are, in theory, driven by the needs of employers who join collectively in order to address retention challenges; BRNs, on the other hand, are driven by the state and may not be as popular because they are seen as part of an existing public workforce system that some employers see as bureaucratic and restrictive.

## Implications for Workforce Policy and Future Research

The findings in this report contribute to the knowledge base of what works for low-skilled, low-wage, entry-level workers. In particular, the findings may prove valuable in discussions that have arisen around how best to design follow-up services authorized under WIOA to support individuals who have been placed into employment but who still require additional coaching and wraparound services to remain employed and advance in their careers. Two aspects of WIOA are relevant to the findings from this report.

- **WIOA emphasizes engaging employers and helping them build the skills and competencies of their existing workforce to help companies remain competitive.** Under WIOA, business-led state and local workforce boards can offer training services to help companies update and/or enhance the skills of their current workforce. While limited by formula-driven funding

allocations, workforce boards can reimburse employers for the costs of training new frontline employees through customized training, OJT, and apprenticeship programs. In other words, many of the training interventions made available under the SWMERN-E are allowable expenses under WIOA. There is nothing that prohibits workforce boards from embedding their workforce staff with local employers to mitigate challenges faced by incumbent workers, especially those related to meeting basic needs and overcoming skills deficiencies—challenges the public workforce system is designed to help individuals navigate. Thus, those designing and operating WIOA services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth may benefit from learning about the ERN model as a way to connect employers and their workers to public resources.

- **WIOA also offers opportunities to provide developmental or essential skills through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act—Title II of WIOA.** Under this provision of the law, employers have the opportunity to develop stronger partnerships with education providers who can design and offer foundational skill development for low-skilled workers looking to enter employment and proceed in a career path. Many SWMERN-E members reported that their workforce lacked both soft skills and basic skills to succeed on the job. Thus, it is important for training providers and workforce professionals to design programs that address not only the occupational skill needs of their workers, but also the soft skills needed to be successful on the job, like communication and professionalism.

While there is a wide body of research on effective service strategies and approaches for serving low-income and barriered populations,<sup>52</sup> there is relatively little research on the effectiveness of using the ERN model as a retention strategy for employers. A goal of the SWMERN-E evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the ERN model in reducing absenteeism and employee turnover at member firms. The study team worked to collect comprehensive feedback on absenteeism and turnover rates for incumbent workers. As documented in the outcomes chapter of this report, however, assessing change in member companies' absenteeism and retention rates over time proved infeasible due to low response rates, challenges administering the employer survey, and unavailability of employee data from firms. To better understand how success coach services affect recipient and business outcomes over time, future research on the ERN model may want to include the following key questions.

- To what extent are success coaches across ERNs actually coaching participants versus providing transactional interventions, such as referrals to outside services?

---

<sup>52</sup> Timmeney, B., & Hollenbeck, K. (2017). *Employer Resource Networks: What works in forming a successful ERN?* Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Retrieved from <https://research.upjohn.org/reports/191>); Hollenbeck, K., Erickcek, G., & Timmeney, B. (2011). *An assessment of the BC CAREERS Employer Resource Network: Its contributions to the ERN model.* Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Retrieved from <http://research.upjohn.org/reports/182>); Derr, M., & Holcomb, P. (2010). *Employer Resource Networks: Uniting businesses and public partners to improve job retention and advancement for low-wage workers.* Oakland, CA and Washington, DC: Social Policy Research Associates and Mathematica Policy Research (Retrieved from <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/employer-resource-networks-uniting-businesses-and-public-partners-to-improve-job-retention-and-advancement-for-low-wage-workers>).

- To what degree do success coaches feel comfortable providing higher-level interventions—including longer-term career pathway-focused coaching to individuals and technical assistance to companies themselves—designed to build a more retention-oriented culture?
- What services might lead to improved employment and earnings for success coaching participants? Are employment and earnings the right measures to consider for services designed to improve the employability and retention of low-income, entry-level workers?
- Why do member firms decide to leave the ERN? Are there ways to improve employer membership and retention? Does the entity serving as the ERN administrator affect employer retention? If so, in what ways?
- How can ERNs better capture network costs and thereby enable more accurate and exhaustive cost studies?

Overall, SWMERN-E implementation was successful, as indicated by how employers, incumbent workers, and jobseekers were satisfied with the services they received. The expanded model provided necessary resources that employers could use to upskill their current workforce—specifically, it provided soft skills and occupational skills training and onboarded OJT to assist new employees to be successful in their new positions. Employers also reported value in networking with one another and working collectively across firms to identify retention challenges in the local community. In sum, while additional research would help clarify key issues, the SWMERN-E model has real potential for addressing issues affecting employee turnover and absenteeism.

## Appendix A: Survey Methodology

---

This appendix describes how participant surveys were administered to five groups:

1. SWMERN-E employers
2. Incumbent workers who received short-term classroom training
3. Incumbent workers who received OJT
4. Incumbent workers who received success coach services
5. Jobseekers who received training

### ***Survey of SWMERN-E Employer Members (Baseline and Follow-Up)***

The SWMERN-E employer member baseline survey was administered in person and via email. It was given in person during the first and second round site visits to new members in 2016 and 2017. (A baseline visit to existing members of the original SWMERN did not involve a survey.) New SWMERN-E employers that were not visited during a site visit were emailed a survey by SPR. Employers who did not complete the email survey were invited by West Michigan TEAM staff and the resource navigator to take the survey on paper at one of the quarterly SWMERN-E meetings. A total of 29 employers were invited to take the baseline survey, and 24 responded (11 in person and 13 online), yielding a baseline survey response rate of 83 percent.

The employer follow-up survey was emailed to employers after they had been members for one year. While every effort was made by the study team and the resource navigator to conduct the SWMERN-E employer member follow-up survey at the one-year anniversary, in a limited number of cases it was conducted within several months of the one-year anniversary date. As with the baseline survey, SWMERN-E members who did not complete the email survey were invited to take the survey in person at one of the quarterly SWMERN-E meetings. In addition, SPR staff solicited the help of the resource navigator and lead success coach, who visited employers and gave them hard copy versions of the survey to complete. These surveys were then collected and sent back to SPR via FedEx. A total of 29 employers were invited to take the SWMERN-E employer member follow-up survey, and 17 responded (nine in person and eight online), yielding a follow-up survey response rate of 58 percent.

Ten of the 39 SWMERN-E employer members were not invited to take the baseline or follow-up survey. In two cases this was because they were no longer members of the ERN; the other eight were subsidiary agencies that were not the primary member organization (i.e., employment agencies that primarily joined because their employer contractor required it).

### ***Survey of Incumbent Workers Receiving Short-Term Classroom Training***

Incumbent workers who participated in short-term classroom training were invited to complete a survey in class during their last week of class. The study team chose to have survey distributed in person because response rates are generally higher with in-person distribution (vs. email

invitations).<sup>53</sup> The study team relied on the West Michigan TEAM staff and the resource navigator to distribute the survey. West Michigan TEAM staff coordinated with the instructor to schedule a time when they could administer the survey during class time. In order to provide anonymity, participants who chose to take the survey placed it, once completed, in an envelope left at the front of the classroom.

Between July 2017 and June 2018, a total of 135 training participants were invited to complete the survey, and 123 responded, yielding a response rate of 91 percent. A small subset (12/135, or 9 percent) received the survey via email instead of in class because West Michigan TEAM staff were unable to schedule time to administer it in person to these participants.

Approximately one-third of incumbent workers who participated in short-term classroom training (66/201) were not surveyed. Of these 66, roughly 70 percent (46/66) were not surveyed because survey administration ended on June 12, 2018, but classes continued through the end of the grant on September 30, 2018. The remaining 30 percent (20/66) were not surveyed because the in-person distribution was not scheduled or had to be canceled due to unforeseen circumstances.

### **Survey of Incumbent Workers Receiving On-the-Job Training (Baseline)**

Incumbent workers who participated in OJT between August 2017 and June 2018 were invited to complete a survey after their training ended. The initial surveys were distributed in person by the resource navigator or by the assigned member firm success coach because response rates are generally higher with in-person distribution (vs. email invitations). As the volume of OJT sessions increased, however, coordinating in-person distribution became very challenging. Therefore, distribution transitioned to email, and the majority of employees (66/93, or 71 percent) received the survey in this way. Among the 93 invited to take the incumbent worker OJT survey, 29 completed it, yielding a response rate of 31 percent.

Approximately 45 percent of OJT participants (77/170) were not surveyed for two reasons. First, in order to meet final evaluation report deadlines, survey administration stopped on June 18, 2018, but OJT continued through the end of the grant, on September 31, 2018. As such, these later (n=36) OJT participants were not included in the survey sample. And second, for about one-half of the OJT participants who were not surveyed (41/77), West Michigan TEAM had difficulties emailing the survey and coordinating with success coaches to distribute it in person.

### **Survey of Incumbent Workers Receiving Success Coach Services (Baseline)**

The success coach participant survey could not be distributed systematically in person because success coach participants did not regularly meet their coaches, and some only met with a coach once. Therefore, the success coach participant baseline survey was distributed by email two weeks after the first meeting, so the employee had time to connect with services they may have been referred to before completing it. The study team chose to have West Michigan TEAM administer the survey so that responses could be connected to the service data also collected by West Michigan

---

<sup>53</sup>Research has demonstrated that in-person surveys yield higher response rates than online surveys. See Heerwegh, D., & Loosveldt, G. (2008). Face-to-face versus web surveying in a high-internet-coverage population. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72, 836–846.

TEAM in their administrative database, Successforce. Service data includes information on type of service and dates that employees met with a success coach.

Two weeks after the initial service, workers received a text message and an email containing a link to the survey. If they did not respond within one week, they received another text and email. One week later, if they had still not responded, they received a third and final text and email. Of the 2,092 workers who received success coach services between April 1, 2016, and September 30, 2018, 424 responded to the baseline survey, resulting in a response rate of 20 percent.

Success coach survey distribution began in June 2016. In June 2017, a gift card incentive was introduced in an effort to increase the survey response rate. Prior to the gift card incentive, the response rate was 20 percent; the overall response rate remained at 20 percent after the incentive was implemented.

In May 2017, demographic questions were added to the survey because the administrative data based maintained by West Michigan TEAM had a lot of missing values for demographics. Demographics were not systemically collected by success coaches because coaches prioritized helping employees with their problems. The demographic survey questions were implemented as a separate survey that appeared after respondents submitted their baseline survey or follow up survey responses. Respondents then had the option of answering the additional demographic questions. A total of 1,365 people were invited to take the demographic survey, and 318 responded, yielding a response rate of 23%.

### ***Survey of Jobseekers Receiving Training (Baseline)***

Jobseekers who participated in occupational and/or soft skills training were invited to complete a survey in class during their last week of class. The study team choose to distribute the survey in person because, as noted earlier, response rates are generally higher with in-person distribution than with email invitations. The study team relied on West Michigan TEAM staff to distribute the survey.

West Michigan TEAM staff coordinated with the instructor to schedule a time when they could distribute the survey in person, during class time. Participants who chose to take the survey placed it, once completed, in an envelope left at the front of the classroom, in order to provide anonymity. Among the 102 participants receiving a survey in class, all completed the survey, for a response rate of 100 percent.

Approximately one-third of jobseeker training participants (39/141) were not surveyed for two reasons. First, survey administration stopped on June 8, 2018, in order to meet final evaluation report deadlines, but training for jobseekers continued through the end of the grant on September 31, 2018. As such, these later (n=7) participants were not included in the survey sample. And second, for the majority of those who were not surveyed (32/39), West Michigan TEAM had difficulties scheduling a time to distribute the survey in class.

### ***Incumbent Worker and Jobseeker Participant One-Year Follow-Up Surveys***

All the follow-up surveys were distributed electronically through emails and text messages by West Michigan TEAM. However, no results from the follow-up survey are reported because of low response rates and two under-sampling errors. The very low response rate (approximately four percent)

occurred despite a \$5 gift card incentive being offered. In addition, there were two implementation errors that raised sampling concerns. First, West Michigan TEAM distributed the one-year follow-up survey only to those who responded to the baseline survey, which was not the intention. The study team became aware of the miscommunication in July 2018 (about nine months after the survey was launched), and at that time the sampling frame was expanded to all success coach participants who had reached their one-year service anniversary. Second, West Michigan TEAM did not send the one-year follow-up survey to the entire population of employees who had received training because the filter that identified people for the follow-up survey was not configured correctly in the West Michigan TEAM participant database.

In general, because of these low response rates on the follow-up surveys for these respondent groups, the research team was not able to answer all the originally proposed outcomes research questions.

### ***Limitations of the Survey Data***

The results derived from the survey data may be biased because they only represent the perceptions of those who responded to the survey. If there was a systematic difference between the people who responded to the surveys and those who did not, the reported results could be biased. For example, if those who were most satisfied with the services received were more likely to complete the survey than those least satisfied, then non-response bias would lead to the underreporting of low satisfaction. We estimate that nonresponse bias may have been a concern only for the success coach participant survey (which had a response rate of about 20 percent). We expect this bias to be low in all the other surveys that we conducted because of their high response rate (about 60 percent or more).

## Appendix B: SWMERN-E Survey Instruments

---

Appendix B contains the following survey instruments:

- Employer Baseline Survey
- Employer Follow-up Survey
- Incumbent Worker Short-Term Classroom Training and OJT Baseline Survey
- Incumbent Worker Success Coach Baseline Survey
- Jobseeker Training Baseline Survey

## Employer Baseline Survey

### Q1

What benefits do you expect to receive as a member of the ERN? *Please select all that apply.*

- Filling open positions
- Networking with other employers
- Increasing job retention
- Decreasing employee absenteeism
- Increasing worker productivity
- Increasing employee job satisfaction
- Accessing employee training
- Helping employees advance in their career
- Saving time in managing employees' non-work-related questions
- Increasing profit
- Other (text)

### Q2

What was your primary reason for joining the ERN? *Please select three at most.*

- Filling open positions
- Networking with other employers
- Increasing job retention
- Decreasing employee absenteeism
- Increasing worker productivity
- Increasing employee job satisfaction
- Accessing employee training
- Helping employees advance in their career
- Saving time in managing employees' non-work-related questions
- Increasing profit
- Other (text)

### Q3

How helpful was West Michigan TEAM during the process of joining the ERN? *Please choose one.*

Extremely helpful. Explain (optional text box)

Somewhat helpful. Explain (optional text box)

Not very helpful. Explain (optional text box)

Not helpful at all. Explain (optional text box)

### Q4

Prior to joining the ERN, how many weeks did it typically take to fill a vacant entry-level position?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks (numeric field)

### Q5

Prior to joining the ERN, did you perceive filling vacant entry-level positions at your company as a challenge? (*Check one*)

Yes, it was a significant challenge

Yes, it was a minor challenge

No, it was not a challenge

### Q6

Prior to joining the ERN, what was your company's absenteeism rate? The absenteeism rate is defined as the number of absent days per worker over one month. Please include vacation and sick days.

Overall? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric field)

For entry-level workers? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric field)

### Q7

Prior to joining the ERN, did you perceive absenteeism of entry-level workers as a challenge? (radio buttons)

Yes, it was a significant challenge

Yes, it was a minor challenge

No, it was not a challenge

### Q8

Prior to joining the ERN, what was your company's turnover rate?

Overall? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

For entry-level workers? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

### Q9

Prior to joining the ERN, did you perceive turnover among entry-level workers at your company as a challenge? (radio buttons)

Yes, it was a significant challenge

Yes, it was a minor challenge

No, it was not a challenge

### Q10

Which of the following most accurately describes your level of networking with other ERN members over the last twelve months? (radio buttons)

I did not network with other ERN members

I networked casually with one or two other ERN members

I networked casually with at least three ERN members

I coordinated or collaborated with one or two ERN members

I coordinated or collaborated with at least three ERN members

Thank you for your assistance in helping the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network improve its services to employers and employees.

## Employer Follow-Up Survey

### Q1

How have you benefited from participating in the ERN? *Please select all that apply.*

- Filling vacant positions
- Networking with other employers
- Increasing job retention
- Decreasing employee absenteeism
- Increasing productivity
- Increasing employee job satisfaction
- Helping employees advance in their career
- Increasing profit
- Other (text)

### Q2

Please rate your satisfaction with the success coach. *(Check one)*

- Very satisfied. Explain (text).
- Satisfied. Explain (text).
- Unsatisfied. Explain (text).
- Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

### Q3

Please rate your satisfaction with filling job vacancies through the ERN. *(Check one)*

- Very satisfied. Explain (text).
- Satisfied. Explain (text).
- Unsatisfied. Explain (text).
- Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

#### Q4

Please rate your satisfaction with training provided to your employees through the ERN.

Very satisfied. Explain (text).

Satisfied. Explain (text).

Unsatisfied. Explain (text).

Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

Not applicable.

#### Q5

Which of the following most accurately describes your level of networking with other ERN members?

I do not network with other ERN members

I network casually with one or two ERN members

I network casually with at least three ERN members

I coordinate or collaborate with one or two ERN members

I coordinate or collaborate with at least three ERN members

#### Q6

As a result of participating in the ERN, have you networked more with other employers in your county?

Yes (Skip to Question 6).

No (skip to Question 7).

Unsure

## Q7

How has networking more with other employers benefited your company?  
*Please select all that apply.*

- Fill open vacancies
- Discuss countywide economic trends
- Cooperate to procure training
- Share best practices in human resources
- Other (text)

## Q8

What was the absenteeism rate at your company in the last month?

- Overall? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)
- For entry-level workers? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

## Q9

Overall, has the absenteeism rate among entry-level workers decreased since your company joined the ERN?

- Yes, the absenteeism rate has decreased significantly
- Yes, the absenteeism rate has decreased somewhat
- No, the absenteeism rate has not decreased

## Q10

What is the current turnover rate at your company?

- Overall? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)
- For entry-level workers? \_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

**Q11**

Overall, has the turnover rate among entry-level workers decreased since your company joined the ERN? (*Check one*)

Yes, the turnover rate has decreased significantly

Yes, the turnover rate has decreased somewhat

No, the turnover rate has not decreased

**Q12**

On average, how many weeks does it take to fill a vacant entry-level position at your company?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks (numeric value)

**Q13**

Overall, has participating in the ERN helped you fill entry-level positions at your company?

Yes, it has helped significantly

Yes, it has helped somewhat

No, it has not helped

**Q14**

How many vacant positions were filled by the ERN?

\_\_\_\_\_ positions (numeric value)

**Q15**

Do you believe that the employer fees for participating in the ERN are fair? (*radio buttons*)

Very fair. Explain (text).

Somewhat fair. Explain (text).

Not fair. Explain (text).

#### Q16

Overall, has ERN membership provided a positive return on investment? *(radio buttons)*

Yes. Explain (text).

No. Explain (text).

Not sure. Explain (text).

#### Q17

Please rate your overall satisfaction with the ERN? *(radio buttons)*

Very satisfied. Explain (text).

Satisfied. Explain (text).

Unsatisfied. Explain (text).

Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

#### Q18

Do you plan to continue to participate in the ERN? *(radio buttons)*

Yes. Explain (text).

No. Explain (text).

Unsure. Explain (text).

Thank you for your assistance in helping the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network improve its services to employers and employees.

## Incumbent Worker Short-term Classroom Training and OJT Baseline Survey

### Q1

How did you first hear about this job training opportunity? *(Check all that apply)*

Brochure *(Please list where you found it)*

Presentation/Meeting

Poster

Supervisor or other employee at your company

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q2

Why did you participate in this job training? *(Check all that apply)*

My supervisor offered me a promotion if I completed the training

To learn skills needed for a job I want

To learn new ways to be successful at work, like goal setting or giving feedback

To learn new ways to communicate with employers and coworkers

To be more marketable to employers

Other *(please specify)*

### Q3

Did you have to go through any of the following steps before starting training? *(Check all that apply)*

Meet in a group with other individuals considering on the job training

Participate in an interview with the employer

Meet with a supervisor or member of the HR department

Meet in a group with other individuals considering the leadership academy

Fill out a training application

Met with the training provider

Other *(please specify)*

#### Q4

Do you feel like you received enough information about on-the-job training before beginning? *(Check one)*

Yes

No *(Please explain)*

Unsure

#### Q5

Did you complete the on-the-job training? *(Check one)*

Yes

No *(If you would like please explain)*

#### Q6

Did you face any obstacles to participating in the training? *(Check one)*

Yes *(If yes, go to question 7)*

No *(If no, please skip to question 8)*

#### Q7

Which obstacles did you experience? *(Check all that apply and please explain any answers at the bottom)*

Inconvenient location *(Please specify below which location was inconvenient)*

Inconvenient schedule *(Please specify below what was inconvenient about the schedule)*

Could not get permission to take the time off

Could not afford to take the time off

Too much of a time commitment

Lack of child care

Lack of transportation

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q8

Has participating in this training program helped you achieve any of the following? *(Check all that apply)*

Learned new occupational skills *(Please specify)*

Learned new workplace skills (e.g., effective communication, problem solving)

Increased my awareness of available job opportunities

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q9

Do you believe that participating in this training *will help* you achieve any of the following in the future? *(Check all that apply)*

Get a new job

Keep my current job

Improve work attendance

Improve job-related performance

Be promoted more quickly

Increase job satisfaction

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q10

How satisfied were you with the training program(s) you participated in? *(Please check one response. If you wish, you can explain the reasons for your rating next to your answer)*

Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

Unsatisfied. Explain (text).

Satisfied. Explain (text).

Very satisfied. Explain (text).

### Q11

How many weeks did you work in the last 12 months (52 weeks or less)?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks (numeric value)

### Q12

Approximately how many days of scheduled work did you miss in the past twelve months?  
*Please do not count vacation, holidays, and paid or unpaid leave, such as medical leave.*  
(Check one)

I was not employed in any of the past 12 months (52 weeks) *(Please skip to question 19)*

0 – 2 days

3 – 10 days

11 – 19 days

More than 20 days

### Q13

Have you achieved any of the following work-related milestones in the last twelve months?  
(Check all that apply)

Pay increase

Promotion and/or advancement

More desirable position in another company

Other *(Please explain)*

### Q14

Are you currently employed? (Check one)

Yes

No

### Q15

How long have you been with your current employer? (Check one)

Less than 3 months

3 – 6 months

6 – 12 months

12 months – 3 years

More than 3 years

#### Q16

What is your current income or pay rate? Please include tips, commissions, bonuses, and regular overtime.

\_\_\_\_\_ income (numeric value)

#### Q17

Is that amount... (*Check one*)

Per piece

Per hour

Per week

Two times a month (often on specific days – for example on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>)

Once a month

Per year

Some other way (*Please explain below*)

I am not sure

#### Q18

Is that amount you listed before or after taxes? (*Check one*)

Before taxes

After taxes

#### Q19

How many hours do you typically work every week? (*Check one*)

Less than 20 hours

20 -- 34 hours

35 or more hours

I am not sure

## Q20

How likely are you to recommend this training to a friend or coworker? *(You can skip this question if you have not completed the training)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all Likely

Extremely Likely

Q21

Please provide any additional comments you would like us to know?

\_\_\_\_\_ (text box)

Q22

What is your gender? (Check one)

Female

Male

Other

Q23

What is your race? (You may select multiple answers)

African American/Black

Asian

Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

Hispanic/Latino

American Indian/Alaska Native

White

Other (*Please specify*)

#### Q24

What is your age? (*Check one*)

18 – 24

25 – 29

30 – 34

35 – 39

40 – 44

45 – 49

50 – 54

55 – 60

61+

#### Q25

What is the number of individuals in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ individuals in household (numeric value)

#### Q26

What is your marital status? (*Check one*)

Divorced

Living with Partner

Married

Separated

Single

Widowed

#### Q27

What is the number of dependent children under age 18 in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ number of dependent children under age 18 (numeric value)

### Q28

What is your highest level of education? *(Check one)*

Grades 1 – 11

High School Diploma

GED

College Certificate

Associate Degree (AA/AS)

Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS)

Any postgraduate studies

Other *(Please explain)*

### Q29

What is your household income? *(Check one)*

0 – \$10,000

\$10,001 – \$15,000

\$15,001 – \$20,000

\$20,001 – \$25,000

\$25,001 – \$30,000

\$35,001 – \$40,000

\$40,001 – \$50,000

\$50,001 – \$60,000

\$60,001 – \$70,000

\$70,001 – \$80,000

\$80,001 – \$90,000

\$90,001 – \$100,000

\$100,001+

Don't know

### Q30

Are you a military veteran? *(Check one)*

Yes

No

### Q31

Do you have a disability? *(Check one)*

Yes

No

### Q32

What is you or your dependent's public assistance history? *(Check one)*

Currently receive a benefit

Received in the past

Never received

Unknown

Thank you for helping the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network (SWMERN) improve its services to workers. This survey is supported by a Workforce Innovation Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Labor in partnership with SWMERN and SPRA.

## Incumbent Worker Success Coach Baseline Survey

### Q1

How did you hear about the services offered by *(insert name of success coach)*? *(Check one)*

Brochure *(Please list where you found it)*

Coworker

Email announcement

Human resources representative

Newsletter

Presentation

Poster

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q2

Which services were you seeking when you met with your coach? *(Select all that apply)*

Transportation-related assistance

Assistance obtaining childcare

Assistance with housing or food

Bridge loan

Work-related training

Help resolving problems with my supervisor or coworkers

Help with personal problems

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q3

Which services have you received from the success coach? How helpful was the service?  
(Please check all that apply) (check boxes and radio buttons)

Referrals to community resources

Helped a lot

Helped somewhat

Did not help

It's too soon to know

Counseling or advice from the success coach

Helped a lot

Helped somewhat

Did not help

It's too soon to know

Referrals to training programs

Helped a lot

Helped somewhat

Did not help

It's too soon to know

Bridge loan funding

Helped a lot

Helped somewhat

Did not help

It's too soon to know

Other (Please specify) (text box)

Helped a lot

Helped somewhat

Did not help

It's too soon to know

#### Q4

Have you experienced any barriers accessing any of the services offered by the success coach? *(Check one)*

Referrals to community resources. Explain (text).

Counseling or advice from the success coach. Explain (text).

Referrals to training programs. Explain (text).

Bridge loan funding. Explain (text).

Other type of service. Explain (text).

#### Q5

So far, how well has the success coach helped you resolve challenges? *(Check one)*

Extremely well. Explain (text).

Somewhat well. Explain (text).

Not very well. Explain (text).

Not well at all. Explain (text).

#### Q6

Have you faced any of the following barriers to meeting with the success coach? *(Check one)*

Inconvenient location. Explain (text).

Inconvenient schedule. Explain (text).

Meeting with the success coach took too much time. Explain (text).

The success coach didn't understand my needs. Explain (text).

Other. Specify (text).

#### Q7

How comfortable do you feel accessing these services from your workplace? *(Check one)*

Very comfortable. Explain (text).

Comfortable. Explain (text).

Uncomfortable. Explain (text).

Very uncomfortable. Explain (text).

### Q8

What is your current wage or salary? Please include tips, commissions, bonuses, and regular overtime.

\_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

Was that:

Per hour

Per week

Once every two weeks

Twice a month

Per month

Per year

Per piece

Some other way

Don't know

### Q9

How many hours do you typically work every week? (*Check one*)

Less than 20

20 – 30

31 – 38

Over 38

### Q10

How long have you been with your current employer? (*Check one*)

Less than 6 months

6 – 12 months

12 months – 3 years

More than 3 years

### Q11

Approximately how many days of scheduled work did you miss in the last twelve months?  
Please exclude days taken as vacation, holidays, and paid or unpaid leave, such as medical leave. (*Check one*)

- 0 – 2 days
- 3 – 10 days
- 11 – 19 days
- More than 20 days

### Q12

How many weeks did you work in the last 12 months (52 weeks)?

\_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

### Q13

Have you achieved any of the following work-related milestones in the last twelve months?  
(*Check all that apply*)

- Pay increase
- Promotion and/or advancement
- More desirable position at another company
- Other (*Please explain*)

End of Survey: Thank you for your assistance in helping the Southwest Michigan Employer  
Resource Network improve its services to workers.

## Jobseeker Training Baseline Survey

### Q1

How did you first hear about this job training? *(Check one)*

Brochure *(Please list where you found it)*

Michigan Works! case manager or staff

Presentation / Meeting

Poster

PATH case manager at DHHS or other staff

Word of mouth

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q2

Why did you participate in the job training? *(Check all that apply)*

An employer offered me a job if I completed the training

To learn technical skills needed for a job I want

To learn new ways to be successful at work, like managing my time or goal setting

To learn new ways to communicate with employers and coworkers

To be more marketable to employers

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q3

Did you have to go through any of the following steps before starting training? *(Check all that apply)*

Talked with a Michigan Works! case manager about your job experience and job goals

Met with one or more of the employers who might hire you after the training

Met in a group with one of the employers who are involved in the training

Filled out a job application

Met with the training provider

Other *(Please specify)*

#### Q4

Do you feel like you received enough information about the training before the program began? *(Check one)*

Yes

No *(Please explain)*

Unsure

#### Q5

Did you complete the program? *(Check one)*

Yes

No *(Please explain)*

#### Q6

Did you face any obstacles to participating in the training? *(Check one)*

Yes *(If yes, go to Question 7)*

No *(If no, please skip to Question 8)*

#### Q7

Which obstacles did you experience? *(Check all that apply)*

Inconvenient location *(Please specify which location was inconvenient)*

Inconvenient schedule *(Please specify which time(s) were inconvenient)*

Too much of a time commitment

Hard to meet household expenses while training

Lack of child care

Lack of transportation

Other *(Please specify)*

### Q8

Do you believe that participating in this specific training will help you achieve any of the following? *(Check all that apply)*

- Get a new job
- Keep my current job
- Improve work attendance
- Improve job-related performance
- Be promoted more quickly
- Increase job satisfaction
- Other *(Please specify)*

### Q9

How satisfied were you with the training program(s) you participated in? *(Check one)*

- Very satisfied. Explain (text).
- Satisfied. Explain (text).
- Unsatisfied. Explain (text).
- Very unsatisfied. Explain (text).

### Q10

Since completing the training, have you become employed by an employer who sponsored the training? *(Check one)*

- I have been hired but I am not sure if my employer sponsored the training
- Not yet, but I am in the hiring process *(Please skip to Question 12)*
- Yes
- No *(Please skip to Question 13)*

### Q11

Which company hired you?

\_\_\_\_\_ (text box) *(Then skip to Question 13)*

### Q12

What company are you in the hiring process with?

\_\_\_\_\_ (text box)

### Q13

About how many weeks did you work in the last twelve months (52 weeks or less)?

\_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

### Q14

Approximately how many days of scheduled work did you miss in the past twelve months?  
Please do not count vacation, holidays, and paid or unpaid leave, such as medical leave.

I was not employed in any of the past 12 months (52 weeks) *(Please skip to Question 22)*

0 – 2 days

3 – 10 days

11 – 19 days

More than 20 days

### Q15

Have you achieved any of the following work-related milestones in the last twelve months?  
*(Check all that apply)*

Pay increase

Promotion and/or advancement

More desirable position at another company

Other *(Please explain)*

#### Q16

Are you currently employed? (*Check one*)

Yes

No

#### Q17

How long have you been with your current employer? (*Check one*)

Less than 3 months

3 – 6 months

6 – 12 months

12 months – 3 years

More than 3 years

#### Q18

What is your current income or pay rate? Please include tips, commissions, bonuses, and regular overtime.

\_\_\_\_\_ (numeric value)

#### Q19

Is that amount? (*Check one*)

Per piece

Per hour

Per week

Two times a month (often on specific days – for example on the 1st and 15<sup>th</sup>)

Once a month

Per year

Some other way (*Please explain*)

I am not sure

#### Q20

Is that amount you listed before or after taxes? *(Check one)*

Before taxes

After taxes

#### Q21

How many hours do you typically work every week? *(Check one)*

Less than 20 hours

20 – 34 hours

35 or more hours

I am not sure

#### Q22

How likely are you to recommend this training(s) to a friend or coworker? *(You can skip this question if you have not completed the training)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all Likely

Extremely Likely

#### Q23

Please provide any additional comments you would like us to know?

\_\_\_\_\_ (text box)

#### Q24

What is your gender? *(Check one)*

Female

Male

Other

### Q25

What is your race? *(Check all that apply)*

African American/Black

Asian

Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

Hispanic/Latino

American Indian/Alaska Native

White

Other

### Q26

What is your age? *(Check one)*

18 – 24

25 – 29

30 – 34

35 – 39

40 – 44

45 – 49

50 – 54

55 – 60

61+

### Q27

What is the number of individuals in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ number of individuals in household (numeric value)

### Q28

What is your marital status? (*Check one*)

- Divorced
- Living with Partner
- Married
- Separated
- Single
- Widowed

### Q29

What is the number of dependent children under age 18 in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ number of dependent children under age 18 (numeric value)

### Q30

What is your highest level of education? (*Check one*)

- Grades 1 – 11
- High School Diploma
- GED
- College Certificate
- Associate Degree (AA/AS)
- Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS)
- Any postgraduate studies
- Other (*Please explain*)

### Q31

What is your household income? (*Check one*)

- 0 – \$10,000
- \$10,001 – \$15,000
- \$15,001 – \$20,000
- \$20,001 – \$25,000
- \$25,001 – \$30,000
- \$35,001 – \$40,000
- \$40,001 – \$50,000
- \$50,001 – \$60,000
- \$60,001 – \$70,000
- \$70,001 – \$80,000
- \$80,001 – \$90,000
- \$90,001 – \$100,000
- \$100,001+
- Don't know

### Q32

Are you a military veteran? (*Check one*)

- Yes
- No

### Q33

Do you have a disability? (*Check one*)

- Yes
- No

**Q34**

What is you or your dependent's public assistance history? (*Check one*)

Currently receive a benefit

Received in the past

Never received

Unknown

Thank you for helping the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network (SWMERN) improve its services to workers. This survey is supported by a Workforce Innovation Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Labor in partnership with SWMERN and SPRA.

## Appendix C:

# Examples of Organizations Offering Industry-Specific Information Sessions and Partner Engagement Activities

The table below includes a sampling of the organizations with whom the WIF program manager and success coaches worked to host information sessions and partner engagement meetings. Each organization listed below held at least one such event under the SWMERN-E project. Overall, more than 30 organizations supported these efforts, which included group presentations as well as one-on-one meetings.

| <u>County</u> | <u>Organizations Offering Industry-Specific Information Sessions</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <u>Organizations Offering Partner Engagement Activities</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Branch        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coldwater Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Employer Resource Fair</li> <li>• Human Resources Network Breakfast in Coldwater</li> <li>• Rotary Club</li> </ul>                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Branch County Community Foundation</li> <li>• Branch County Community Network</li> <li>• Branch County Economic Development Growth Alliance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             |
| Calhoun       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battle Creek Unlimited</li> <li>• The Coordinating Council of Battle Creek</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Albion Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Battle Creek Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• City of South Haven</li> <li>• Marshall Area Economic Development Alliance</li> <li>• Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| Kalamazoo     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced Manufacturing Consortium in Kalamazoo</li> <li>• Healthcare Consortium of Kalamazoo</li> <li>• Kalamazoo Human Resource Managers Association (KHRMA)</li> <li>• Kinexus</li> <li>• Michigan Economic Development Corporation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Kalamazoo</li> <li>• Kalamazoo Area Labor Management Committee</li> <li>• Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</li> <li>• Michigan Department of Transportation</li> <li>• Michigan Manufacturing and Technology Center</li> <li>• Southwest Michigan First</li> </ul> |
| St. Joseph    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotary Club</li> <li>• St. Joseph County Human Resource Council</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Coldwater</li> <li>• Southwest Michigan First</li> <li>• Sturgis Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                |

## Appendix D:

# Community and Faith-Based Organizations Hosting Information Sessions and Partner Engagement Meetings

---

The table below includes a sampling of the organizations with whom the WIF program manager and success coaches worked to host information sessions and partner engagement meetings. Each organization listed below held at least one such event under the SWMERN-E project. Overall, more than 20 organizations supported these efforts.

### Examples of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Hosting Information Sessions and Partner Engagement Meetings

- Branch County Community Foundation
  - Branch County Community Network
  - Community Action
  - First Baptist Church
  - Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland
  - Heritage Community of Kalamazoo
  - Housing Resources Inc.
  - Human Resource Network
  - Kalamazoo Gospel Mission
  - Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Corporation
  - Kalamazoo RESA
  - Michigan Human Resources Development, Inc.
  - Open Doors Kalamazoo
  - St. Joseph Human Services Commission
  - The Coordinating Council of Battle Creek
  - United Way
  - Urban Alliance
-

## Appendix E:

### SWMERN-E Members by Date Joined, New or Existing, and County

| No. | SWMERN-E Member <sup>54</sup>        |                             | Date Joined | Left SWMERN-E <sup>55</sup> | New or Existing <sup>56</sup> | County            |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1   |                                      | American Axle               | Aug 2017    | Jan 2018                    | New                           | St. Joseph        |
| 2   | Battle Creek Shared Service Alliance | Garden of Dreams            | May 2016    |                             | New                           | Calhoun           |
| 3   |                                      | Take a Break Childcare      | May 2016    |                             | New                           | Calhoun           |
| 4   |                                      | Woodlawn Preschool          | May 2016    |                             | New                           | Calhoun           |
| 5   |                                      | Bell's Brewery              | Oct 2016    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo         |
| 6   |                                      | Bickford Senior Living      | May 2018    |                             | New                           | Calhoun Kalamazoo |
| 7   |                                      | Bronson Health Battle Creek | Oct 2011    |                             | Existing                      | Calhoun           |
| 8   |                                      | Bronson Health Kalamazoo    | Oct 2011    |                             | Existing                      | Kalamazoo         |
| 9   |                                      | Caster Concepts             | July 2017   |                             | New                           | Calhoun           |
| 10  |                                      | CLS Uniform and Linen       | Mar 2017    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo         |
| 11  |                                      | Consumers Credit Union      | May 2017    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo         |
| 12  |                                      | Denso                       | Oct 2011    | June 2017                   | Existing                      | Calhoun           |
| 13  |                                      | Denso Air                   | July 2015   | June 2017                   | New                           | Calhoun           |
| 14  |                                      | Eimo Technologies           | Oct 2017    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo         |
| 15  |                                      | Employment Group            | Oct 2011    | June 2017                   | Existing                      | Calhoun Kalamazoo |
| 16  |                                      | Fabri-Kal                   | Feb 2013    |                             | Existing                      | Kalamazoo         |
| 17  |                                      | Graphic Packaging           | May 2018    | Sept 2018                   | New                           | Kalamazoo         |
| 18  |                                      | Greenleaf Hospitality Group | Oct 2011    |                             | Existing                      | Kalamazoo         |
| 19  |                                      | GT Independence             | Dec 2016    |                             | New                           | St. Joseph        |
| 20  |                                      | Heritage Community          | Oct 2011    |                             | Existing                      | Kalamazoo         |

<sup>54</sup> The three employers represented under the Battle Creek Shared Service Alliance have one ERN share divided among them. Each organization signed an individual agreement, and the ERN administrator helped to negotiate the shared agreement; thus, they were treated as three employers for the new member calculation. Bronson Kalamazoo and Bronson Battle Creek were treated as separate employers since each location negotiated a separate ERN agreement. Summit Polymers East was treated as a single employer, as their executive team signed a single agreement, and a single share was divided across their three locations, all in the same county. Summit Polymers Sturgis has a separate executive team and is located in a different county than Summit Polymers East, so it was treated as its own ERN member for the new member calculation.

<sup>55</sup> A "Yes" means the member left the SWMERN-E between October 1, 2015 and September 30, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> "Existing" refers to an employer that signed an agreement to join the SWMERN prior to October 1, 2014. "New" refers to an employer that signed an agreement to join between October 1, 2014, and October 31, 2018.

| No. | SWMERN-E Member <sup>54</sup> |                                   | Date Joined | Left SWMERN-E <sup>55</sup> | New or Existing <sup>56</sup> | County     |           |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 21  |                               | Iceburg                           | Mar 2016    | April 2016                  | New                           | St. Joseph |           |
| 22  |                               | Impact Label                      | Nov 2016    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
| 23  |                               | Janesville Acoustics              | Dec 2017    |                             | New                           | Calhoun    |           |
| 24  |                               | Kelly Services                    | Oct 2011    | June 2016                   | Existing                      | Calhoun    |           |
| 25  |                               | KRESA                             | Feb 2017    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
| 26  |                               | MANN+HUMMEL                       | Nov 2016    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
| 27  |                               | Melling Engineered Alum. Castings | Mar 2018    |                             | New                           | Calhoun    |           |
| 28  |                               | OnStaff USA                       | Oct 2011    | June 2017                   | Existing                      | Calhoun    | Kalamazoo |
| 29  |                               | Outerwears                        | Oct 2017    |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
| 30  |                               | Pro Services                      | Oct 2016*   |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
| 31  |                               | Rosler Metal Finishing            | Mar 2018    |                             | New                           | Calhoun    |           |
| 32  |                               | Specialized Staffing              | July 2015   | June 2017                   | New                           | Calhoun    | Kalamazoo |
| 33  | Summit Polymers East          | Summit Polymers Portage           | June 2015   |                             | New                           | Kalamazoo  |           |
|     |                               | Summit Polymers Vicksburg         |             |                             |                               |            |           |
|     |                               | Summit Polymers Kalamazoo         |             |                             |                               |            |           |
| 34  |                               | Summit Polymers Sturgis           | Mar 2016    |                             | New                           | St. Joseph |           |
| 35  |                               | Sturgis Molded Products           | Mar 2016*   |                             | New                           | St. Joseph |           |
| 36  |                               | TH Plastics                       | Mar 2016    |                             | New                           | St. Joseph |           |
| 37  |                               | US Staffing                       | Oct 2011    | June 2017                   | Existing                      | Calhoun    |           |
| 38  |                               | WSI                               | Mar 2016    |                             | New                           | St. Joseph |           |
| 39  |                               | XL Machine                        | Oct 2017    |                             | New                           | St. Joseph |           |

## Appendix F:

### SWMERN-E Members by Size and Industry

| No. | SWMERN-E Member <sup>57</sup>        |                             | Size <sup>58</sup> |                  | Primary NAICS Code <sup>59</sup>                               | Primary Industry Focus    |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
|     |                                      |                             | General            | No. of Employees |                                                                |                           |
| 1   |                                      | American Axle               | Large              | 1,600            | 332999 – Automobile Parts & Supplies Wholesale & Manufacturers | Manufacturing             |
| 2   | Battle Creek Shared Service Alliance | Garden of Dreams            | Small              | 59               | 624410 – Child Day Care Services                               | Childcare services        |
| 3   |                                      | Take a Break Childcare      |                    |                  |                                                                |                           |
| 4   |                                      | Woodlawn Preschool          |                    |                  |                                                                |                           |
| 5   |                                      | Bell's Brewery              | Medium             | 535              | 722511 – Full-Service Restaurants                              | Manufacturing             |
| 6   |                                      | Bickford Senior Living      | Small              | 70               | 623312 – Assisted Living Facilities for the Elderly            | Healthcare—long-term care |
| 7   |                                      | Bronson Health Battle Creek | Large              | 1,300            | 8062 – Health Services, General Medical and Surgical Hospitals | Healthcare                |
| 8   |                                      | Bronson Health Kalamazoo    | Large              | 7,500            | 8062 – Health Services, General Medical and Surgical Hospitals | Healthcare                |
| 9   |                                      | Caster Concepts             | Medium             | 108              | 5085 – Industrial Supplies                                     | Manufacturing             |
| 10  |                                      | CLS Uniform and Linen       | Medium             | 118              | 5085 – Industrial Supplies                                     | Linen services            |
| 11  |                                      | Consumers Credit Union      | Medium             | 268              | 6061 – Credit Unions, Federally Chartered                      | Financial services        |
| 12  |                                      | Denso                       | Large              | 2,800            | 5099 – Durable Goods, not elsewhere classified                 | Manufacturing             |
| 13  |                                      | Denso Air                   | Medium             | Unknown          | 5051 – Metals Service Centers and Offices                      | Manufacturing             |

<sup>57</sup> The three employers represented under the Battle Creek Shared Service Alliance have one ERN share divided among them. Each organization signed an individual agreement, and the ERN administrator helped to negotiate the shared agreement; thus, they were treated as three employers for the new member calculation. Bronson Kalamazoo and Bronson Battle Creek were treated as separate employers since each location negotiated a separate ERN agreement. Summit Polymers East was treated as a single employer, as their executive team signed a single agreement, and a single share was divided across their three locations, all in the same county. Summit Polymers Sturgis has a separate executive team and is located in a different county than Summit Polymers East, so it was treated as its own ERN member for the new member calculation.

<sup>58</sup> For analysis purposes, SPR defines small businesses as having 1–99 employees, medium as 100–999, and large as 1000+. The number of employees was self-reported by employers to SWMERN-E success coaches. In cases where the actual number of employers was listed as “unknown” on the SWMERN-E member survey, the study team gathered information from the resource navigator to determine the relative size of the company (i.e., small, medium or large).

<sup>59</sup> For NAIC codes that are listed as unknown, the study team used demographic data supplied by the business on the SWMERN-E member survey and/or interviews with the lead success coach and resource navigator.

| No. | SWMERN-E Member <sup>57</sup> |                                   | Size <sup>58</sup> |                  | Primary NAICS Code <sup>59</sup>                                   | Primary Industry Focus    |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
|     |                               |                                   | General            | No. of Employees |                                                                    |                           |
| 14  |                               | Eimo Technologies                 | Medium             | 255              | 3089 – Plastic Products, not elsewhere classified                  | Manufacturing             |
| 15  |                               | Employment Group                  | Small              | Unknown          | 7361 – Employment Agencies                                         | Staffing services         |
| 16  |                               | Fabri-Kal                         | Medium             | 240              | 326199 – All Other Plastics Product Mfg.                           | Manufacturing             |
| 17  |                               | Graphic Packaging                 | Medium             | 303              | 2621 – Paper Mills                                                 | Manufacturing             |
| 18  |                               | Greenleaf Hospitality Group       | Medium             | 582              | Unknown                                                            | Services—Hospitality      |
| 19  |                               | GT Independence                   | Medium             | 250              | 6282 – Investment Advice                                           | Services—Financial        |
| 20  |                               | Heritage Community                | Medium             | 483              | 8059 – Nursing and Personal Care Facilities                        | Healthcare—long-term care |
| 21  |                               | Iceburg                           | Unknown            | Unknown          | Unknown                                                            | Manufacturing             |
| 22  |                               | Impact Label                      | Small              | 58               | 2759 – Commercial Printing, not elsewhere classified               | Manufacturing             |
| 23  |                               | Janesville Acoustics              | Medium             | 315              | 3714 – Motor Vehicle Parts and Accessories                         | Manufacturing             |
| 24  |                               | Kelly Services                    | Small              | Unknown          | 7361 – Employment Agencies                                         | Services—Staffing         |
| 25  |                               | KRESA                             | Medium             | 663              | 8211 – Elementary and Secondary Schools                            | Services—Educational      |
| 26  |                               | MANN+HUMMEL                       | Medium             | 521              | Unknown                                                            | Manufacturing             |
| 27  |                               | Melling Engineered Alum. Castings | Medium             | 100              | Unknown                                                            | Manufacturing             |
| 28  |                               | OnStaff USA                       | Small              | Unknown          | 7361 – Employment Agencies                                         | Services—Staffing         |
| 29  |                               | Outerwears                        | Small              | 85               | 315280 – Other Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing                   | Manufacturing             |
| 30  |                               | Pro Services                      | Medium             | 379              | Unknown                                                            | Manufacturing             |
| 31  |                               | Rosler Metal Finishing            | Medium             | 113              | 3471 – Electroplating, Plating, Polishing, Anodizing, and Coloring | Manufacturing             |
| 32  |                               | Specialized Staffing              | Small              | Unknown          | 7361 – Employment Agencies                                         | Services—Staffing         |
| 33  | Summit Polymers East          | Summit Polymers Portage           | Medium             | 525              | 2759 – Commercial Printing, not elsewhere classified               | Manufacturing             |
|     |                               | Summit Polymers Vicksburg         |                    |                  |                                                                    |                           |
|     |                               | Summit Polymers Kalamazoo         |                    |                  |                                                                    |                           |

| No. | SWMERN-E Member <sup>57</sup> |                         | Size <sup>58</sup> |                  | Primary NAICS Code <sup>59</sup>                     | Primary Industry Focus |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
|     |                               |                         | General            | No. of Employees |                                                      |                        |
| 34  |                               | Summit Polymers Sturgis | Medium             | 169              | 2759 – Commercial Printing, not elsewhere classified | Manufacturing          |
| 35  |                               | Sturgis Molded Products | Medium             | 159              | 333511 – Industrial Mold Manufacturing               | Manufacturing          |
| 36  |                               | TH Plastics             | Medium             | 200              | 3089 – Plastics Products, not elsewhere classified   | Manufacturing          |
| 37  |                               | US Staffing             | Small              | Unknown          | 7361 – Employment Agencies                           | Services—Staffing      |
| 38  |                               | WSI                     | Small              | 70               | 7361 – Employment Agencies                           | Services—Staffing      |
| 39  |                               | XL Machine              | Small              | 84               | Unknown                                              | Manufacturing          |

## Appendix G:

# Final SWMERN-E Performance Outcomes

The table below presents Upjohn’s final grant performance outcomes as reported to US DOL in their final quarterly performance report. In six instances SPR collected data to compute the outcome to confirm if the information coincided with data reported by Upjohn; instances where SPR’s record differs from what Upjohn reported to US DOL are explained in footnotes.

| <u>Desired ERN Outcomes<br/>by Target Group</u>                                            | <u>Actual<br/>Achieved</u>                                         | <u>Met/Unmet/<br/>Exceeded<br/>Goal</u> | <u>Data<br/>Source</u>                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Employers</b>                                                                           |                                                                    |                                         |                                             |
| <b>Increase the number of counties with an active ERN from 2 to 4</b>                      | 3 of 4 counties (Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph) <sup>60</sup> | Unmet                                   | Interviews and/or Successforce              |
| <b>Increase the number of employers participating in an ERN from 10 to 25</b>              | Increased by 29 new employer members <sup>61</sup>                 | Exceeded                                | Interviews and/or Successforce              |
| <b>Fill 33 percent of all employer job openings through ERN assistance</b>                 | 13 percent of employer job openings filled                         | Unmet                                   | Administrative Data                         |
| <b>Achieve retention rate of 89 percent for all new employers added to the ERN</b>         | 83 percent new member retention rate <sup>62</sup>                 | Unmet                                   | Interviews and/or Successforce              |
| <b>100 percent of employers will implement or participate in the career pathway system</b> | 100 percent                                                        | Met                                     | Interviews with employers and program staff |

<sup>60</sup> SPR obtained this information from interview data collected during site visits.

<sup>61</sup> SPR shows an increase of 29 new employer members from the original 10, for a total SWMERN-E membership of 39 employers. Upjohn reported a total of 37 total employers. Three employers represented under the Battle Creek Shared Service Alliance have a single ERN share divided among them. Each organization signed an individual agreement, and the ERN administrator helped to negotiate the shared agreement; thus, SPR treated them as three employers for the new member calculation. Bronson Kalamazoo and Bronson Battle Creek were treated as separate employers since each location negotiated a separate ERN agreement, and this accounts for one of the additional employer members in the study team’s calculation. Summit Polymers East was treated as a single employer, as their executive team signed a single agreement, and a single share was divided across their three locations, all in the same county. Summit Polymers Sturgis has a separate executive team and is located in a different county than Summit Polymers East, so it was treated as its own ERN member for the new member calculation, which this accounts for the second additional employer member in the study team’s calculation. (See Appendix E for a complete list of old and new SWMERN-E members.)

<sup>62</sup> Upjohn reported a retention rate for new SWMERN-E members of 99 percent. Administrative data, however, show that Upjohn achieved an actual new employer retention rate of 83 percent (i.e., 29 new members minus five new members who left during the grant period, divided by the 29 total new members).

| <u>Desired ERN Outcomes<br/>by Target Group</u>                                                                                           | <u>Actual<br/>Achieved</u>                       | <u>Met/Unmet/<br/>Exceeded<br/>Goal</u> | <u>Data<br/>Source</u>               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Incumbent Workers</b>                                                                                                                  |                                                  |                                         |                                      |
| 90 percent of ERN new hires will receive soft skills training                                                                             | 97 percent received training                     | Exceeded                                | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |
| 100 individuals will be placed in OJT or subsidized employment                                                                            | 170 were placed in OJT <sup>63</sup>             | Exceeded                                | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |
| <b>Jobseekers</b>                                                                                                                         |                                                  |                                         |                                      |
| 300 individuals will be placed in industry-specific or employer-specific training                                                         | 311 individuals were placed in training          | Exceeded                                | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |
| 85 percent of individuals who received training will be placed in employment following training                                           | 84 percent were placed in employment             | Unmet                                   | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |
| 90 percent of individuals who were placed in OJT or subsidized employment will maintain employment 90 days post-OJT/subsidized employment | 91 percent maintained employment                 | Exceeded                                | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |
| <b>Incumbent Workers and Jobseekers</b>                                                                                                   |                                                  |                                         |                                      |
| A total of 2,350 new participants will be served                                                                                          | 2,604 new participants were served <sup>64</sup> | Exceeded                                | Administrative data/<br>Successforce |

<sup>63</sup> SPR obtained this total from Upjohn administrative records. All 170 individuals are incumbent employees that received OJT.

<sup>64</sup> SPR obtained this total by combining data from West Michigan TEAM's database with Upjohn administrative records. The total includes 2,092 participants who were reported in West Michigan TEAM's database as receiving success coach services. It also includes totals obtained from Upjohn's administrative records: 170 incumbent workers who received OJT, 201 incumbent workers who received short-term classroom training, and 141 jobseekers who received training. The 141 jobseekers is an unduplicated count (Upjohn reported 247 jobseekers to US DOL, which includes 106 duplicates who took two types of training).

## Appendix H: Supplemental Outcomes Analysis

Exhibit H-1: Jobseeker Satisfaction with Training by Type  
*How satisfied were you with the training program(s) you participated in?*

| <u>Satisfaction Level</u> | <u>CNA</u><br>N=19 |      | <u>CNC Operator</u><br>N=23 |      | <u>Culinary</u><br>N=11 |      | <u>Production Tech</u><br>N=41 |      | <u>Warehouse Management</u><br>N=8 |      | <u>All Responses</u><br>N=102 |      |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|
|                           | N                  | %    | N                           | %    | N                       | %    | N                              | %    | N                                  | %    | N                             | %    |
| Very Unsatisfied          |                    |      |                             |      |                         |      |                                |      |                                    |      |                               |      |
| Unsatisfied               | 0                  | 0%   | 1                           | 4%   | 0                       | 0%   | 0                              | 0%   | 0                                  | 0%   | 1                             | 1%   |
| Satisfied                 | 1                  | 5%   | 1                           | 4%   | 0                       | 0%   | 9                              | 22%  | 1                                  | 13%  | 12                            | 12%  |
| Very satisfied            | 18                 | 95%  | 19                          | 83%  | 7                       | 64%  | 31                             | 76%  | 7                                  | 88%  | 82                            | 80%  |
| Missing                   | 0                  | 0%   | 2                           | 9%   | 4                       | 36%  | 1                              | 2%   | 0                                  | 0%   | 7                             | 7%   |
| Total                     | 19                 | 100% | 23                          | 100% | 11                      | 100% | 41                             | 100% | 8                                  | 100% | 102                           | 100% |

Source: Jobseeker training participant baseline survey, 2016-2018.

**Exhibit H-2: Jobseeker Satisfaction by Year**  
*How satisfied were you with the training program(s) you participated in?*

| <u>Satisfaction Level</u> | <u>All</u><br>N=102 |             | <u>2016</u><br>N=31 |             | <u>2017</u><br>N=45 |             | <u>2018</u><br>N=26 |             |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                           | N                   | %           | N                   | %           | N                   | %           | N                   | %           |
| Very Satisfied            | 82                  | 80%         | 25                  | 81%         | 35                  | 78%         | 22                  | 85%         |
| Satisfied                 | 12                  | 12%         | 4                   | 13%         | 4                   | 9%          | 4                   | 15%         |
| Unsatisfied               | 1                   | 1%          | 1                   | 3%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| Very Unsatisfied          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| Missing                   | 7                   | 7%          | 1                   | 3%          | 6                   | 13%         | 0                   | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>102</b>          | <b>100%</b> | <b>31</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>45</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>26</b>           | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Jobseeker training participant baseline survey, 2016-2018.

**Exhibit H-3: Jobseeker “Recommend to a Friend” by Year**  
*How likely are you to recommend the training to a Friend?*  
*0 is the lowest rating and 10 is the highest*

| <u>Rating</u> | <u>All</u><br>N=102 |             | <u>2016</u><br>N=31 |             | <u>2017</u><br>N=45 |             | <u>2018</u><br>N=26 |             |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
|               | N                   | %           | N                   | %           | n                   | N           | %                   | N           |
| 10            | 78                  | 76%         | 24                  | 77%         | 36                  | 80%         | 18                  | 69%         |
| 9             | 4                   | 4%          | 0                   | 0%          | 2                   | 4%          | 2                   | 8%          |
| 8             | 5                   | 5%          | 4                   | 13%         | 1                   | 2%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 7             | 4                   | 4%          | 0                   | 0%          | 1                   | 2%          | 3                   | 12%         |
| 6             | 2                   | 2%          | 0                   | 0%          | 2                   | 4%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 5             | 1                   | 1%          | 0                   | 0%          | 1                   | 2%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 4             | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 3             | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 2             | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 1             | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| 0             | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| Missing       | 8                   | 8%          | 3                   | 10%         | 2                   | 4%          | 3                   | 12%         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>102</b>          | <b>100%</b> | <b>31</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>45</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>26</b>           | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Jobseeker training participant baseline survey, 2016-2018.

#### Exhibit H-4: Incumbent Worker Training Participants\*

##### Satisfaction by Year

*How satisfied were you with the training program(s) you participated in?*

| <u>Satisfaction Level</u> | <u>All</u><br>N=152 |      | <u>2017</u><br>N=75 |      | <u>2018</u><br>N=77 |      |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|
|                           | N                   | %    | n                   | %    | n                   | %    |
| Very Satisfied            | 79                  | 52%  | 43                  | 57%  | 36                  | 47%  |
| Satisfied                 | 56                  | 37%  | 23                  | 31%  | 33                  | 43%  |
| Unsatisfied               | 1                   | 1%   | 0                   | 0%   | 1                   | 1%   |
| Very Unsatisfied          | 12                  | 8%   | 7                   | 9%   | 5                   | 6%   |
| Missing                   | 4                   | 3%   | 2                   | 3%   | 2                   | 3%   |
| Total                     | 152                 | 100% | 75                  | 100% | 77                  | 100% |

Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2017–2018.

Note: Incumbent worker participants include individuals receiving short-term classroom training or OJT.

#### Exhibit H-5: Incumbent Worker Training Participants\*

##### “Recommend to a Coworker” by Year

*How likely are you to recommend the training to a Coworker?*

*0 is the lowest rating and 10 is the highest*

| <u>Rating</u> | <u>All</u><br>N=152 |      | <u>2016</u><br>N=75 |      | <u>2017</u><br>N=77 |      |
|---------------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|
|               | N                   | %    | N                   | %    | N                   | %    |
| 10            | 58                  | 38%  | 31                  | 41%  | 27                  | 35%  |
| 9             | 24                  | 16%  | 7                   | 9%   | 17                  | 22%  |
| 8             | 32                  | 21%  | 18                  | 24%  | 14                  | 18%  |
| 7             | 10                  | 7%   | 3                   | 4%   | 7                   | 9%   |
| 6             | 7                   | 5%   | 5                   | 7%   | 2                   | 3%   |
| 5             | 9                   | 6%   | 5                   | 7%   | 4                   | 5%   |
| 4             | 1                   | 1%   | 0                   | 0%   | 1                   | 1%   |
| 3             | 4                   | 3%   | 2                   | 3%   | 2                   | 3%   |
| 2             | 0                   | 0%   | 0                   | 0%   | 0                   | 0%   |
| 1             | 1                   | 1%   | 1                   | 1%   | 0                   | 0%   |
| 0             | 0                   | 0%   | 0                   | 0%   | 0                   | 0%   |
| Missing       | 6                   | 4%   | 3                   | 4%   | 3                   | 4%   |
| Total         | 152                 | 100% | 75                  | 100% | 77                  | 100% |

Source: Incumbent worker short-term classroom training and OJT baseline survey, 2017–2018.

Note: Incumbent worker participants include individuals receiving short-term classroom training or OJT.

Exhibit H-6: Success Coach Participant Services Received & How Helped, by Year

| <u>Counseling or advice from the success coach</u>    | <u>All</u> |      | <u>2016</u> |      | <u>2017</u> |      | <u>2018</u> |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|                                                       | N=424      |      | N=121       |      | N=204       |      | N=99        |      |
|                                                       | N          | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    |
| Did not help                                          | 15         | 4%   | 1           | 1%   | 10          | 5%   | 4           | 4%   |
| Helped a lot                                          | 219        | 52%  | 65          | 54%  | 103         | 50%  | 51          | 52%  |
| Helped somewhat                                       | 50         | 12%  | 16          | 13%  | 24          | 12%  | 10          | 10%  |
| I did not receive counseling or advice from the coach | 123        | 29%  | 34          | 28%  | 56          | 27%  | 33          | 33%  |
| I have not connected with the success coach yet       | 0          | 0%   | 0           | 0%   | 0           | 0%   | 0           | 0%   |
| It's too soon to know                                 | 17         | 4%   | 5           | 4%   | 11          | 5%   | 1           | 1%   |
| Total                                                 | 424        | 100% | 121         | 100% | 204         | 100% | 99          | 100% |

| <u>Referral to community resources</u>              | <u>All</u> |      | <u>2016</u> |      | <u>2017</u> |      | <u>2018</u> |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|                                                     | N=424      |      | N=121       |      | N=204       |      | N=99        |      |
|                                                     | N          | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    |
| Did not help                                        | 35         | 8%   | 11          | 9%   | 17          | 8%   | 7           | 7%   |
| Helped a lot                                        | 163        | 38%  | 52          | 43%  | 76          | 37%  | 35          | 35%  |
| Helped somewhat                                     | 48         | 11%  | 14          | 12%  | 23          | 11%  | 11          | 11%  |
| I did not receive a referral to community resources | 102        | 24%  | 26          | 21%  | 51          | 25%  | 25          | 25%  |
| I have not connected with the resource yet          | 43         | 10%  | 13          | 11%  | 19          | 9%   | 11          | 11%  |
| It's too soon to know                               | 33         | 8%   | 5           | 4%   | 18          | 9%   | 10          | 10%  |
| Total                                               | 424        | 100% | 121         | 100% | 204         | 100% | 99          | 100% |

| <u>Referral to training programs</u>              | <u>All</u> |      | <u>2016</u> |      | <u>2017</u> |      | <u>2018</u> |      |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|                                                   | N=424      |      | N=121       |      | N=204       |      | N=99        |      |
|                                                   | N          | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    | N           | %    |
| Did not help                                      | 8          | 2%   | 3           | 2%   | 3           | 1%   | 2           | 2%   |
| Helped a lot                                      | 67         | 16%  | 24          | 20%  | 25          | 12%  | 18          | 18%  |
| Helped somewhat                                   | 22         | 5%   | 8           | 7%   | 9           | 4%   | 5           | 5%   |
| I did not receive a referral to training programs | 278        | 66%  | 69          | 57%  | 140         | 69%  | 69          | 70%  |
| I have not connected with the resource yet        | 32         | 8%   | 10          | 8%   | 18          | 9%   | 4           | 4%   |
| It's too soon to know                             | 17         | 4%   | 7           | 6%   | 9           | 4%   | 1           | 1%   |
| Total                                             | 424        | 100% | 121         | 100% | 204         | 100% | 99          | 100% |

### Exhibit H-6: Success Coach Participant Services Received & How Helped, by Year, Continued

| <u>Hardship loan</u>              | <u>All</u><br>N=424 |             | <u>2016</u><br>N=121 |             | <u>2017</u><br>N=204 |             | <u>2018</u><br>N=99 |             |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                                   | N                   | %           | N                    | %           | N                    | %           | N                   | %           |
| Did not help                      | 5                   | 1%          | 2                    | 2%          | 1                    | 0%          | 2                   | 2%          |
| Helped a lot                      | 56                  | 13%         | 21                   | 17%         | 26                   | 13%         | 9                   | 9%          |
| Helped somewhat                   | 6                   | 1%          | 1                    | 1%          | 3                    | 1%          | 2                   | 2%          |
| I did not receive a hardship loan | 348                 | 82%         | 95                   | 79%         | 169                  | 83%         | 84                  | 85%         |
| It's too soon to know             | 9                   | 2%          | 2                    | 2%          | 5                    | 2%          | 2                   | 2%          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>424</b>          | <b>100%</b> | <b>121</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>204</b>           | <b>100%</b> | <b>99</b>           | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Incumbent worker success coach baseline survey, 2016–2018.

### Exhibit H-7: Success Coach Participants “Recommend to a Coworker” by Year *How likely are you to recommend your Success Coach to a Coworker? 0 is the lowest rating and 10 is the highest*

| <u>Rating</u> | <u>All</u><br>N=424 |             | <u>2016</u><br>N=31 |             | <u>2017</u><br>N=45 |             | <u>2018</u><br>N=26 |             |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
|               | N                   | %           | N                   | %           | N                   | %           | N                   | %           |
| 10            | 310                 | 73%         | 92                  | 76%         | 145                 | 71%         | 73                  | 74%         |
| 9             | 25                  | 6%          | 7                   | 6%          | 10                  | 5%          | 8                   | 8%          |
| 8             | 26                  | 6%          | 4                   | 3%          | 17                  | 8%          | 5                   | 5%          |
| 7             | 15                  | 4%          | 5                   | 4%          | 7                   | 3%          | 3                   | 3%          |
| 6             | 12                  | 3%          | 2                   | 2%          | 7                   | 3%          | 3                   | 3%          |
| 5             | 14                  | 3%          | 5                   | 4%          | 7                   | 3%          | 2                   | 2%          |
| 4             | 8                   | 2%          | 3                   | 2%          | 3                   | 1%          | 2                   | 2%          |
| 3             | 4                   | 1%          | 0                   | 0%          | 3                   | 1%          | 1                   | 1%          |
| 2             | 3                   | 1%          | 1                   | 1%          | 1                   | 0%          | 1                   | 1%          |
| 1             | 2                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 1                   | 0%          | 1                   | 1%          |
| 0             | 5                   | 1%          | 2                   | 2%          | 3                   | 1%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| Missing       | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          | 0                   | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>424</b>          | <b>####</b> | <b>121</b>          | <b>####</b> | <b>204</b>          | <b>####</b> | <b>99</b>           | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Incumbent worker success coach baseline survey, 2016–2018.

# References

---

- Bragg, D., Dresser, L., & Smith, W. (2012). *Leveraging workforce development and postsecondary education for low-skilled, low-income workers: Lessons from the shifting gears initiative*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Crook, C. (2018, July 6). Full employment. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved February 24, 2019, from [www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/full-employment](http://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/full-employment)
- Derr, M., & Holcomb, P. (2010). *Employer Resource Networks: Uniting businesses and public partners to improve job retention and advancement for low-wage workers*. Oakland, CA and Washington, DC: Social Policy Research Associates and Mathematica Policy Research. Retrieved from <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/employer-resource-networks-uniting-businesses-and-public-partners-to-improve-job-retention-and-advancement-for-low-wage-workers>
- Fortson, K., Rotz, D., Burkander, P., Mastri, A., Schochet, P., Rosenberg, L., McConnell, S., & D'Amico, R. (2017). *Providing public workforce services to job seekers: 30-month impact findings on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.
- Goger, A. et al. (2018). *State of California employment training panel: program assessment*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates.
- Guest, J., Bennett, S., & Guest, B. (2017). *Career Navigation System guidebook*. Fairfax, VA: National Career Pathways Technical Assistance Center.
- Heerwegh, D., & Loosveldt, G. (2008). Face-to-face versus web surveying in a high-internet-coverage population. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72, 836–846.
- Hollenbeck, K., Erickcek, G., & Timmeney, B. (2011). *An assessment of the BC CAREERS Employer Resource Network: Its contributions to the ERN model*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved from <http://research.upjohn.org/reports/182>
- Kenworthy, L., & Marx, I. (2018). In-work poverty in the United States. In H. Lohmann & I. Marx (Eds.), *Handbook on in-work poverty* (pp. 328–344). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Khemani, D. and Mack, M. (2018). *Expanding employer engagement: A guide to developing and sustaining an Employer Resource Network*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates. Retrieved from <https://www.spra.com/wordpress2/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ERN-Implementation-Guide-Final.pdf>
- Mahan, T., Nelms, D., Bearden, C. R., & Pearce, B. (2019). *2019 retention report: Trends, reasons, and a call to action*. Franklin, TN: Work Institute. Retrieved from <http://info.workinstitute.com/retentionreport2019>
- Martinson, K. (2010). *Partnering with employers to promote job advancement for low-skill individuals*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- Maxwell, N., & Rotz, D. (2017). Potential assistance for disadvantaged workers: Employment social enterprises. *Journal of Labor Research*, 38, 145–168.

- Michigan Works! Association (2018). *A history of innovation*. Retrieved from [www.michiganworks.org/about-michigan-works/history-of-innovation/](http://www.michiganworks.org/about-michigan-works/history-of-innovation/)
- Mitchell, W., & Muysken, J. (2008). *Full employment abandoned: Shifting sands and policy failures*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Osterman, P. (2017). In search of the high road: Meaning and evidence. *ILR Review*, 71, 3–34. Retrieved from <https://iwer.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/In-Search-of-the-High-Road.pdf>
- Redcross, C., Barden, B., Bloom, D., Tso, A., Fink, B., Worth, F., & Farrell, M. (2016). *The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration*. New York, NY: MDRC. Retrieved from <https://www.mdrc.org/project/enhanced-transitional-jobs-demonstration#overview>
- Strawn, J., & Martinson, K. (2000). *Steady work and better jobs: How to help low-income parents sustain employment and advance in the workforce*. New York, NY: MDRC. Retrieved from <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/steady-work-and-better-jobs>
- Timmeney, B., & Hollenbeck, K. (2017). *Employer Resource Networks: What works in forming a successful ERN?* Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved from <https://research.upjohn.org/reports/191>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017, October 24). *Employment projections: 2016–26* [News Release USDL-17-1429]. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecopro.pdf>