



Fact Sheet

Who we are: The West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA) is thousands of people representing businesses, institutions and governmental units who have a stake in the future of the region. WMSA focuses on eight counties: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo and Ottawa.

When we started: WMSA was formed in 2000 when 250 volunteers were convened to discuss critical factors affecting the region.

What we do: We facilitate conversation, cooperation and collaboration. The **vision** of the WMSA is “for West Michigan to be a best place in the Midwest to live, learn, work and play.” The **mission** of the WMSA is “to be a catalyst for regional collaboration.”

Our priorities: Regional input sessions determined these six Priorities for Regional Collaboration are essential in preserving the health of and fostering growth in West Michigan:

- Creating a Regional Mindset
- Ensuring a Sustainable Environment
- Revitalizing our Urban Centers
- Developing a Growth Strategy
- Strengthening our Community through Diversity
- Fostering a Prosperous Economy

Current Initiatives:

- Literacy to Work – an effort to expand the Making College Accessible pilot underway in Kent County. The LTW program is intended to help individuals who lack the basic literacy credentials to obtain a living wage job and access additional funding to further their education and skills under Michigan’s mainstream No Worker Left Behind (NWLB) program.
- Internships – To improve the region’s educational attainment, WMSA has launched an initiative to create an additional 3,000 internships for current university and college students;
- Green Infrastructure—an effort to identify, protect and connect the interconnected network of green space and other environmental assets in West Michigan that support the functions of natural ecosystems and provide benefits to people;
- Regional Indicators—a process to establish measurement of the quality of life in the region;
- WIRED (Workforce Innovations in Regional Economic Development)—a U.S. Department of Labor funded program to increase workforce and economic development innovation in the regional economy.

Current information about our priorities, initiatives and progress can be found on our Web site: www.wm-alliance.org.



“WMSA is a national model for regional leadership.”
– Sam Liekens, Council on Competitiveness, 4/10

FIVE BEST MEASURABLE RESULTS

- WMSA’s regional mindset led to a \$15 million WIRED grant that supported 12 new initiatives for workforce innovation.
- In 2009, West Michigan issued the most National Career Readiness Certificates per capita in the country.
- The West Michigan Internship Initiative created 500 new internships in the region in 2009.
- As a result of WMSA/WIRED, 45 CEOs target improvement of educational attainment in the region from 35% to 60% with post-secondary certificates by 2025.
- Identified as a critical natural asset of the region in 2002, the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area was protected in 2009 through a regional public/private partnership.
- WMSA’s Green Infrastructure Initiative has partnered in the development of several tools for green infrastructure and land use planning and protection: Natural Connections Map, West Michigan Toolkit for Local Green Inventories, INVEST, the West Michigan Agricultural report, and the online Green Infrastructure Toolshed.

WMSA BENEFITS

BUSINESS

- Regional visibility in the global market, opens more doors
- Quality of life aids recruitment and retention of intellectual capital
- Government collaboration cuts red tape while reducing costs

PHILANTHROPY

- WMSA is a connector, encouraging a regional perspective among government, business and non profits
- Connections help avoid duplication to maximize resources

GOVERNMENT

- WMSA brings local units together- sharing best practices
- As a region, West Michigan interests are stronger in Lansing

CITIZEN ACTIVIST

- WMSA provides regional data
- Opportunities for networking with like-minded people for better coordinated execution
- WMSA shares ideas and resources among communities and other groups