



REI SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS COLLABORATIVE ECONOMIC INNOVATIONS FOR MICHIGAN'S COMMUNITIES

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Since its establishment in 2011 by Michigan State University's Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED), the Regional Economic Innovation (REI) initiative has built a collaborative approach to advancing economic progress across Michigan.

Supported by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA), REI's mission focuses on fostering collaboration between experts, policymakers, and communities to co-create strategies, tools, models, and policies that promote economic resilience and sustainability in the state's most economically challenged regions. This unique approach has seen REI engage with key issues, including resilience planning, financial sustainability, 21st-century communication infrastructure, and the advancement of circular economies.

As part of its ongoing commitment to innovation, REI has cultivated partnerships with EDA Economic Development Districts, as well as public and private organizations, to serve both rural and urban areas of Michigan. These collaborations have resulted in over 180 impactful projects that focus on creating or retaining jobs and businesses, particularly in economically distressed areas of the state.



2024 REI Summit Keynote Panel

For over a decade, REI has supported three project types: Co-Learning Plans, Innovation Fellowships (also known as Co-Implementation Plans), and Student-Led/Faculty-Guided technical assistance projects. These projects bring together multiple stakeholders, including university students, to develop new strategies for more equitable community and economic development.

This year, 17 projects were co-created with the community and 11 of these projects were presented at the annual *Innovate Michigan!* Summit. The Summit, which took place on August 15th at the Kellogg Conference Center in Lansing, also included the Michigan Inventors Coalition (MIC) Expo. MIC provides targeted technical support to early-stage startup inventors and entrepreneurs in Michigan communities, empowering them to introduce innovative products rapidly and confidently to the market.



2024 Michigan Inventor's Coalition Expo

The events attracted hundreds of attendees, including inventors and stakeholders, who participated in sessions and voted for their favorite inventions. The Summit also featured a keynote address from State Senator Mallory McMorrow, who discussed critical topics such as affordable housing, sustainability, and the Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve (SOAR) Fund.



Phyllis Sykes, Nic Custer, and Adil Mohammed



Summit Registration Table



Summit Breakout Sessions

SPOTLIGHT ON CO-LEARNING PLANS AND INNOVATION FELLOWSHIPS

During the Summit innovative projects were presented showcasing the breadth of REI's impact across Michigan's communities, including:

- **The International Center of Greater Flint and the Global Flint Initiative Co-Learning Plan:** The Global Flint Initiative is a grassroots effort to attract international talent and promote Flint as a Welcoming Community. By conducting extensive outreach with immigrant and native populations, this project aimed to create a cohesive strategy for revitalizing Flint's economy through the retention of international talent.
- **Diversified Community Investment Fund Co-Learning Plan:** This project sought to reverse the decline of locally owned businesses in Michigan's Upper Peninsula by introducing a community investment fund. The fund would enable local residents to crowd-fund small businesses, bringing economic vitality back to the region.
- **A Regional Model for Small Business Prosperity Co-Learning Plan:** This is a case study of four Michigan Works! program services in Northwest Lower Michigan. This study provided a comprehensive review of the program's small business development services and their impact in statistically underserved communities. Research into the programs would help to identify strengths and weaknesses and could help other regional entities such as chambers of commerce, county governments, and industry leaders to potentially replicate the programs' referral methods. These best practices would be influential in helping distressed local communities build their economic bases.
- **The Align Center for Workforce Development (ACWD Innovation Fellowship):** Focused on addressing workforce training gaps, the ACWD project proposed a unified resource hub for financial empowerment and job training. The project aims to create living-wage jobs and attract both public and private investment to City of Adrian and Lenawee County by fostering employer-specific skill development.

STUDENT-LED INITIATIVES

REI's commitment to fostering student-led projects was evident in the innovative initiatives presented at the Summit. For example, MSU's Urban and Regional Planning Program partnered with Detroit organizations to assess housing conditions in the city's Morningside neighborhood. The project, which involved surveying vacant and occupied homes, will inform future efforts to secure funding for neighborhood revitalization.

Other student-led projects included sustainability initiatives such as the investigation into consumer plastic behaviors in Marquette, Michigan. This research, conducted in collaboration with Recycle906, aimed to develop recommendations for reducing plastic consumption and improving recycling practices in the community.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY OPPORTUNITIES

One of REI's key focus areas is the support of circular economics, which emphasizes the sustainable use of resources. A standout project in this realm is the Co-Constructing Circular Economic Opportunities through University Waste to Organics Diversion initiative, which addresses the issue of food waste at Northern Michigan University. By diverting food waste from landfills and transforming it into organic material for agriculture, the project shares the potential of circular economic models to drive environmental and economic benefits.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025: THE CALL FOR CO-LEARNING PLANS

As REI continues to support innovative community and economic development projects, it will soon issue its annual call for Co-Learning Plan proposals towards the end of October. These plans will serve as a crucial source of information for local and state economic development practitioners, helping them make informed decisions that affect Michigan's communities.

The findings and recommendations derived from Co-Learning Plans have the potential to inform policymakers about the strategies most likely to create or retain jobs and businesses in economically distressed regions. By fostering collaboration between stakeholders, REI continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Michigan's economy.

REI's commitment to collaboration, innovation, and sustainable development has had over \$68 million in economic impact on Michigan's communities. By engaging with a wide range of partners and focusing on areas such as resilience planning, workforce development, and circular economies, REI has become a driving force for economic and social progress.

To learn more about REI's initiatives or to submit a proposal for a Co-Learning Plan, visit <https://reicenter.org/projects/24-25-project-overviews> or contact Jenan Jondy at jondyjen@msu.edu. REI looks forward to continuing its work with communities across the state to drive innovation and create lasting economic opportunities.



Summit Breakout Sessions, Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center