
2026 REI Projects & July 9th Event



In 2026, REI's projects reflect implementation-focused research, technical assistance, and practitioner-led innovation across Michigan.

This year's Innovation Fellowship supports the development of an Industry-Led Circular Economy Council for Michigan led by 2026 REI Innovation Fellow, Chelsea Jensen of Llink Technologies. The project will produce a feasibility study and implementation roadmap for a statewide, industry-driven council designed to help manufacturers adopt more circular production systems. The work will assess industry readiness, governance models, and operational needs while identifying priority industries and material streams where circular strategies can deliver the greatest impact.

REI's Student-Led, Faculty-Guided (SLFG) projects continue to provide hands-on technical assistance to communities. Three projects led by MSU's Dr. Jesus J. Lara focused on planning, climate adaptation, and neighborhood revitalization. In East Lansing, a practicum team supported community engagement and planning concepts for the East Village district. In Grand Rapids, students conducted a citywide inventory of bus stop shade coverage to support equitable climate adaptation and transit planning. In Flint, a Martin Park neighborhood planning effort developed a revitalization roadmap centered on housing repair, infrastructure improvements, and expanded economic opportunity.

Two additional SLFG projects from MSU's College of Engineering highlight the role of data and technology in community development. In Luce County, students are digitizing and analyzing historical timber lease records to support long-term planning tied to a unique forest management revenue model. In Southwest Lansing, a student team is building a prototype open-source data tool to make information on food access, housing, and economic opportunity more accessible to residents and local organizations.

REI's 2026 Co-Learning Plan projects explore emerging economic development models across the

state. One project evaluates low-power communication networks for rural Michigan, with potential applications for remote care delivery and workforce access. A second project in Ecorse explores ecosystem-based economic development approaches centered on shared ownership and democratic finance. A third examines how Community Benefit Agreements and ordinances can be adapted for rural communities like Kalkaska facing large-scale development pressures.

Beyond project-based work, REI continues its long-standing partnership with the Michigan Inventors Coalition, supporting the annual Michigan Inventors Expo. Now in its 14th year, the event brings together inventors, entrepreneurs, and economic development professionals for panels, networking, exhibitions, and pitch competitions that support Michigan's startup innovation ecosystem.

To share this work and look ahead, REI will host a statewide gathering on July 9 - similar in style in to past summits, but with additional focus on REI's next phase. The event will highlight outcomes from the 2026 projects while inviting partners into a broader conversation about where REI goes next. We welcome your feedback on what you would most like to see included in this convening.

Learn more about the [2026 Projects, here](#).

Learn more about the [July 9th REI Summit, here](#).

LOOKING AHEAD:

Recent conversations with partners have surfaced important reflections that will help shape REI's future. One consistent theme is that REI's strength lies in its focus of place based economic development innovation understood through communities lived experience. REI has focused on translating research into accessible language and practical tools communities can use. Partners have also encouraged REI to share insights more directly and expand implementation-focused work across the state.

As REI evolves, we remain deeply grateful to all of you as our partners who make this work possible—*thank you for your continued dedication to community.* We want to hear from you... Share your insights and join us on July 9th!