



Economic Development Recovery Strategy Proposal

SUMMARY

Kent County has had a long-standing strategy to invest in The Right Place as the county's economic development partner. As Kent County's businesses begin restarting their businesses and bringing employees back to work, The Right Place and Kent County have the unique opportunity to partner to build and execute a strategy to maximize the county's economic recovery efforts.

This provides strategic recommendations for an enhanced partnership with the county to support industry recovery within The Right Place's identified industry sectors. The following proposal outlines a variety of partnership opportunities, utilizing emergency recovery funds to provide enhanced economic recovery support for Kent County businesses.

PROPOSAL ELEMENTS

1. **Covid-19 Business Retention**

The Right Place is currently working to develop a Covid-19 specific retention call program for our business development team. This new program will have a completely different set of questions, resources, and connections related to business restarts, safety protocols, financing connections, supply chain management, and more. Kent County's support and partnership in this program will ensure the county's businesses have the resources and information they need to successfully and safely restart their companies. The Right Place will communicate and connect Kent County specific resources.

2. **Talent Retention and Attraction**

Emerging from this economic strain, the demand for talent (at all levels) will be higher than ever. Combine that demand with recent reports of workers moving out of bigger cities, seeking smaller communities, and opportunities abound for those ready to act. Kent County's support of aggressive talent retention and attraction strategies will position the county and region to retain and attract the talent our businesses need to succeed.

a. ***Outbound Marketing and Talent Attraction***

There are media reports that workers are beginning move out of bigger cities. The same cycle happened in 2011 at the end of the Great Recession. Hello West Michigan is prepared to run an aggressive outbound marketing campaign for Kent County specifically to Michigan boomerangs outside of the State. The team will focus on Chicago and other larger cities depending on where the data shows the highest potential.

b. ***ReThink West Michigan***

ReThink West Michigan is a casual, professional networking event in West Michigan on Thanksgiving Eve, one of the most popular times of the year to travel back “home” for former Michiganders. West Michigan companies, with the help of community organizations and collaborators, show attendees why it’s time to take another look at West Michigan.

c. ***Human Resource Restart Advising***

Although the path ahead is unknown, our business community is beginning to tackle the challenge of how to reopen and keep team members safe. While this looks different for every company, there are many things we can learn from one another. While new programs and resources are being announced, there is such a high volume of information and red tape that it can often feel overwhelming. We have team members dedicated to assisting with Kent County businesses talent challenges, and they can connect them with the resources they need. This is why we’ve recently launched a new section of our website focused on reopening playbooks. Several local companies have already submitted their plans to be shared, and our team will continue curating this library of restart plans and provide expert insights for business restart resources.

3. **CovidWM.org Resource Site**

On March 30, A coalition of business associations and local governments announced the launch of a website that provides information to West Michigan businesses and workers who have been hurt by the coronavirus pandemic. The website, covidwm.org, was created by the West Michigan COVID-19 Business Coalition. Members include Experience Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and The Right Place. To date, The Right Place has performed site updates, added content, and responded to 20-30 inquiries daily. The site has become a critical resource for both businesses and community organizations. Unfortunately, funding support to continue the site and associated communications has dwindled. Kent County become a leader in this coalition by funding the continued work required to keep businesses informed through this site.

4. **Industry Councils**

Today, The Right Place facilitates four industry councils for West Michigan businesses (Manufacturers Council, Supply Chain Management Council, Technology Council, and MiDevice a medical device council). As businesses restart their operations, companies must be able to learn from each other and thus recover faster. The Right Place and Kent County have the

opportunity to collaborate and provide the funding needed for individual companies to join these councils and beginning learning from each other.

5. PPE Equipment Collaboration

Ensuring Kent County-based companies have access to adequate PPE for their employees is critical to the safe restart of the county economy. Through a strategic partnership between The Right Place and Kent County, together we can keep workers safe and provide much needed support for county employers.

The Right Place would like to support the county's newly adopted PPE program by proactively promoting the program to Kent County businesses and connecting them to the program resources. Our organization has already launched a PPE directory for area businesses, and we would like to add the Kent County PPE program to that growing area of our website and social media.

BUDGET

To support this additional COVID-related work and provide the enhanced customer service needed to support Kent County primary employers at this time, The Right Place proposes a budget of: **\$600,000**. This funding will allow the organization to scale up faster and reach more companies quicker, resulting in fewer job losses in Kent County.

ADDENDUM

The following initiatives may also be considered in future phases of economic recovery in Kent County, to support businesses in the county.

1. **Talent Retention and Attraction**

Upskilling/Reskilling partnership with GRCC and MMTC

State funding for the MEDC's highly successful funding was recently eliminated as a result of the Covid crisis. This was after many Kent County companies submitted applications for funding to hire and/or reskill/upskill employees. There is an opportunity to access those applications locally and operate a similar initiative locally in Kent County. Kent County-based businesses that applied would have their applications reviewed by West Michigan Works. Approved applications would be forwarded to GRCC to provide reskilling/upskilling services to Kent County businesses. Kent County could allocate funds to support this reskilling/upskilling effort in the absence of state funding.

2. **PPE Diversification and Supply Chain Development**

Similar to a program recently launched by the MEDC; Kent County, The Right Place, and MMTC could partner to provide matching retooling funds for Kent County businesses pursuing retooling and diversification effort to produce health and safety equipment on an ongoing basis. The Right Place would work with county resources to build criteria by which companies would be eligible for county funding, and MMTC would work directly with the companies on their retooling/diversification efforts.

About MMTC: Since 1991, the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center-West (The Center) has helped small and medium-sized manufacturers become stronger and more competitive. Designed to meet your needs, we develop more effective business leaders, drive product and process innovation, promote company-wide operational excellence, and foster creative strategies for business growth and greater profitability.