

# Economic & Workforce Trends In Michigan's Upper Peninsula

**Debb Brunell, CEO**

Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!

[dbrunell@upmichiganworks.org](mailto:dbrunell@upmichiganworks.org)

906-399-5156



# Long-Term Population Trends



## MEDIAN AGE

Median age in the U.P. is **over 42**, which is 3 years more than the **US median age of 39**



## AGE GROUPS

**23% over 65** versus 18% in the state and 17% nationally



## PRIME AGE

Prime age workers (aged 25-54) represent **only 33% of the population** compared to 37% in the state and 39% nationally



## AGE SHIFTS

The U.P. lost **8.5% of its prime-age population** while gaining 18.5% in the 65+ category



# Age Composition and Workforce Pipeline

## Older Age Structure

The U.P. has a significantly older population compared to Michigan and the national average, with 23% aged 65 or older in 2023.

## Declining Prime-age Workforce

The prime-age workforce (25-34) in the U.P. is shrinking, representing only 33% of the population, lowering workforce availability.

## Impact on Workforce and Healthcare

These demographic shifts increase workforce shortages and healthcare demand, especially for elder services in the region.

## Strategies for the Future

Retention of younger workers and economic engagement of older adults are key strategies to address demographic challenges.



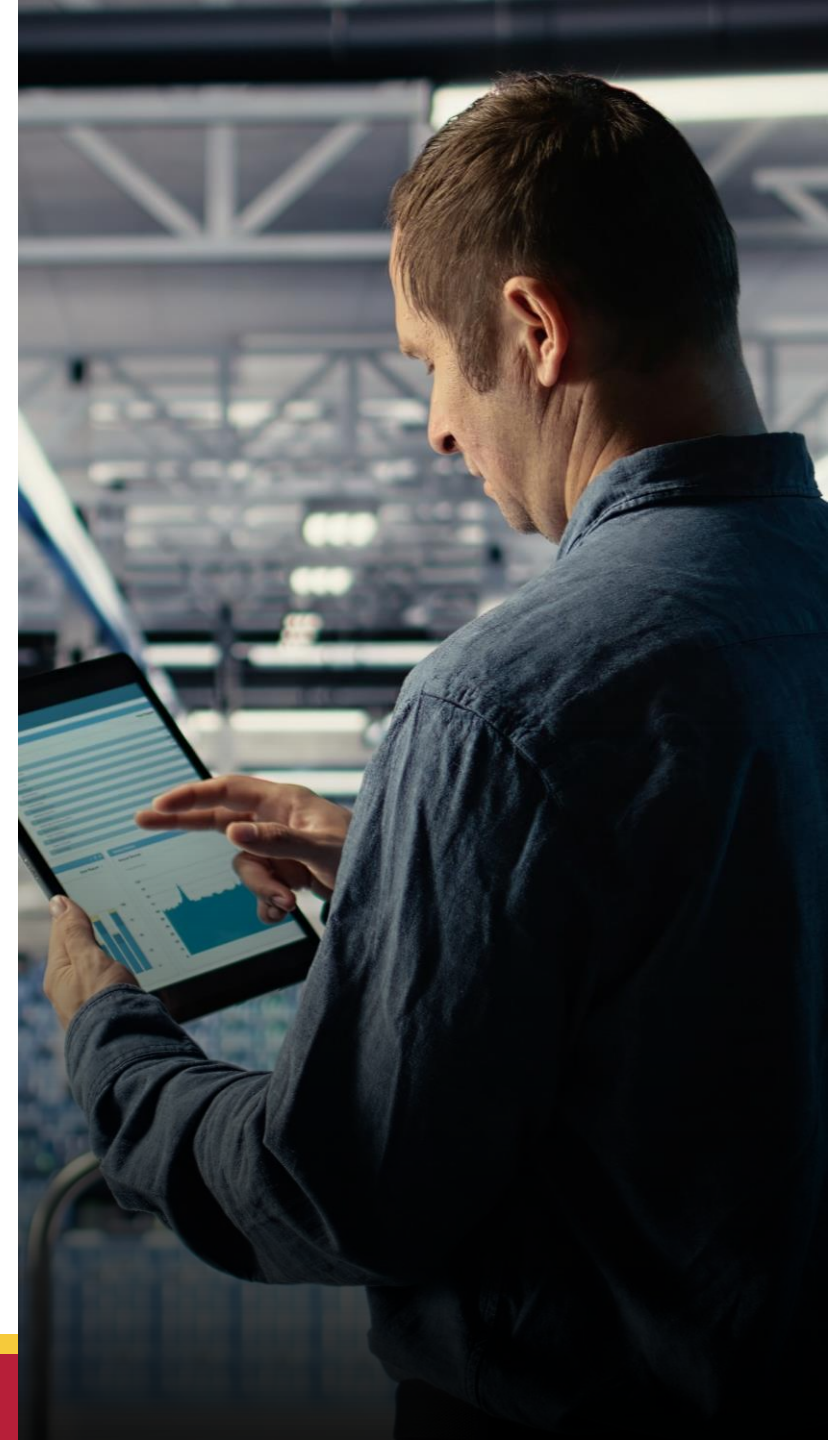


# Federal Policy and Regional Uncertainty



## Healthcare Access Risks

Medicaid work requirements starting in 2027 risk limiting healthcare access and impact labor participation.



# Federal Policy and Regional Uncertainty

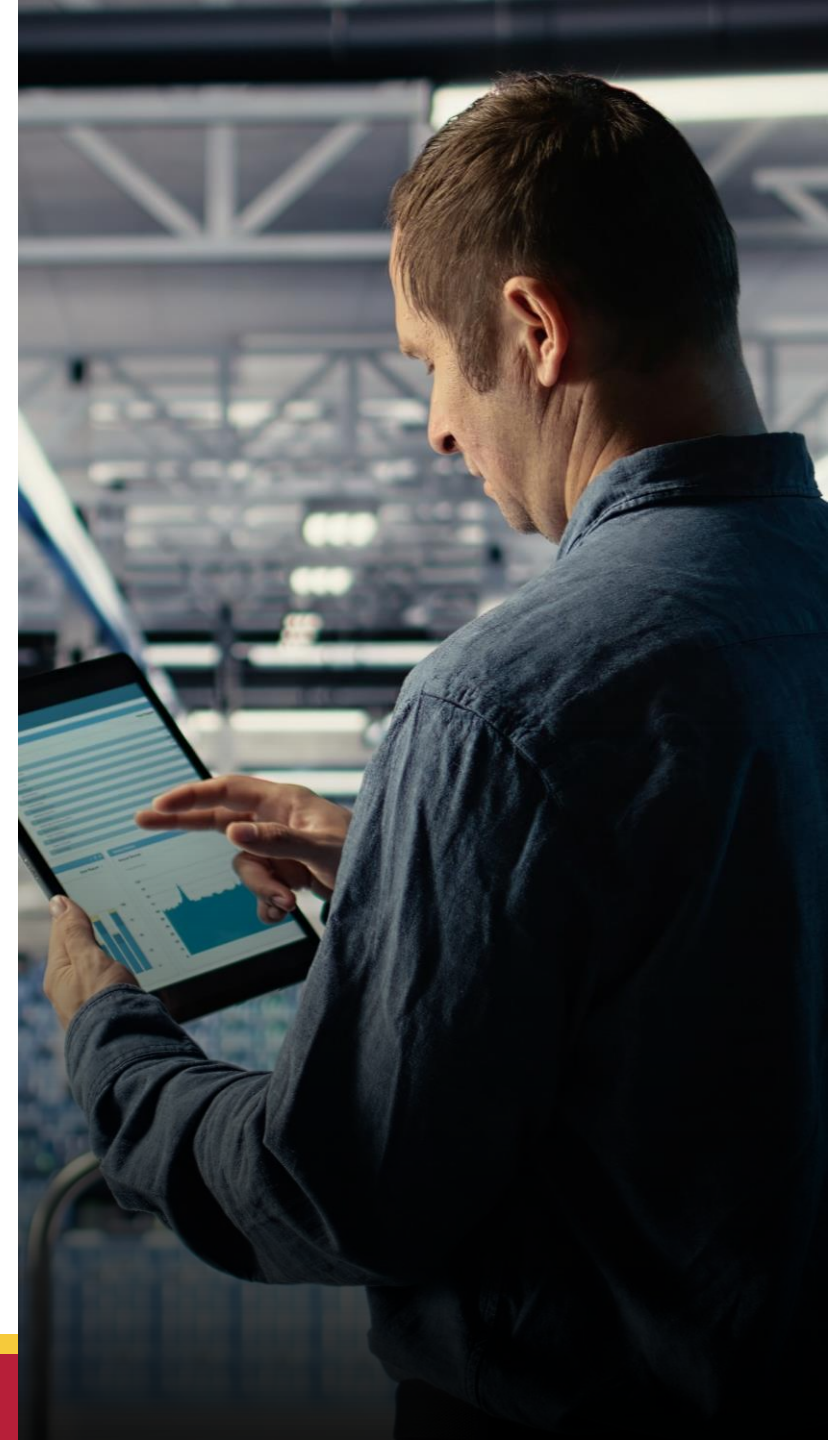


## Healthcare Access Risks

Medicaid work requirements starting in 2027 risk limiting healthcare access and impact labor participation.

## Workforce Training Challenges

WIOA funding favors training payments but underfunds essential wraparound services, hindering rural workers.



# Federal Policy and Regional Uncertainty



## Healthcare Access Risks

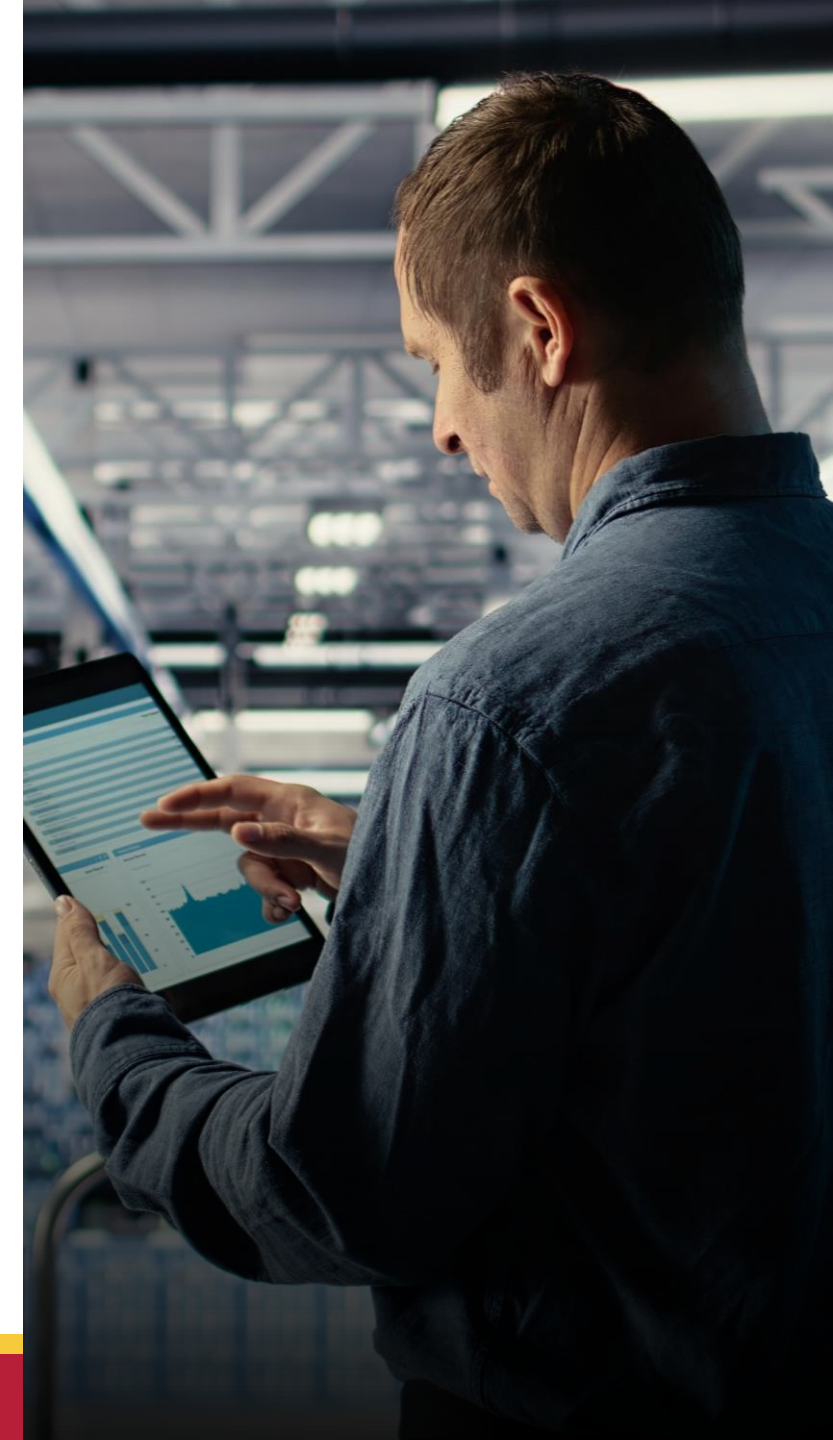
Medicaid work requirements starting in 2027 risk limiting healthcare access and impact labor participation.

## Workforce Training Challenges

WIOA funding favors training payments but underfunds essential wraparound services, hindering rural workers.

## Mining Sector Uncertainty

Eagle Mine closure and Copperwood Mine uncertainties threaten high-wage jobs and may increase out-migration.





# Federal Policy and Regional Uncertainty



## Healthcare Access Risks

Medicaid work requirements starting in 2027 risk limiting healthcare access and impact labor participation.

## Workforce Training Challenges

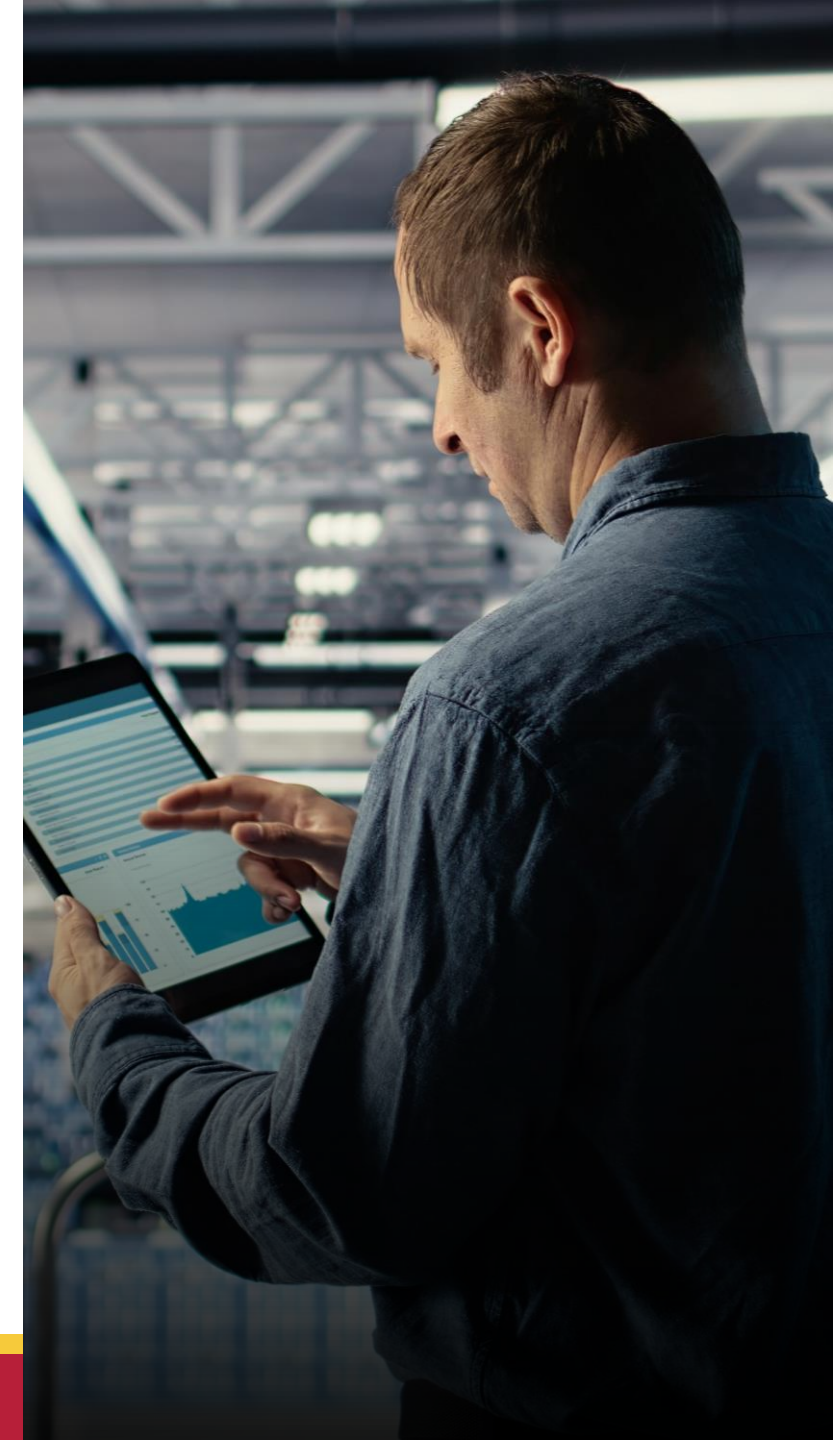
WIOA funding favors training payments but underfunds essential wraparound services, hindering rural workers.

## Mining Sector Uncertainty

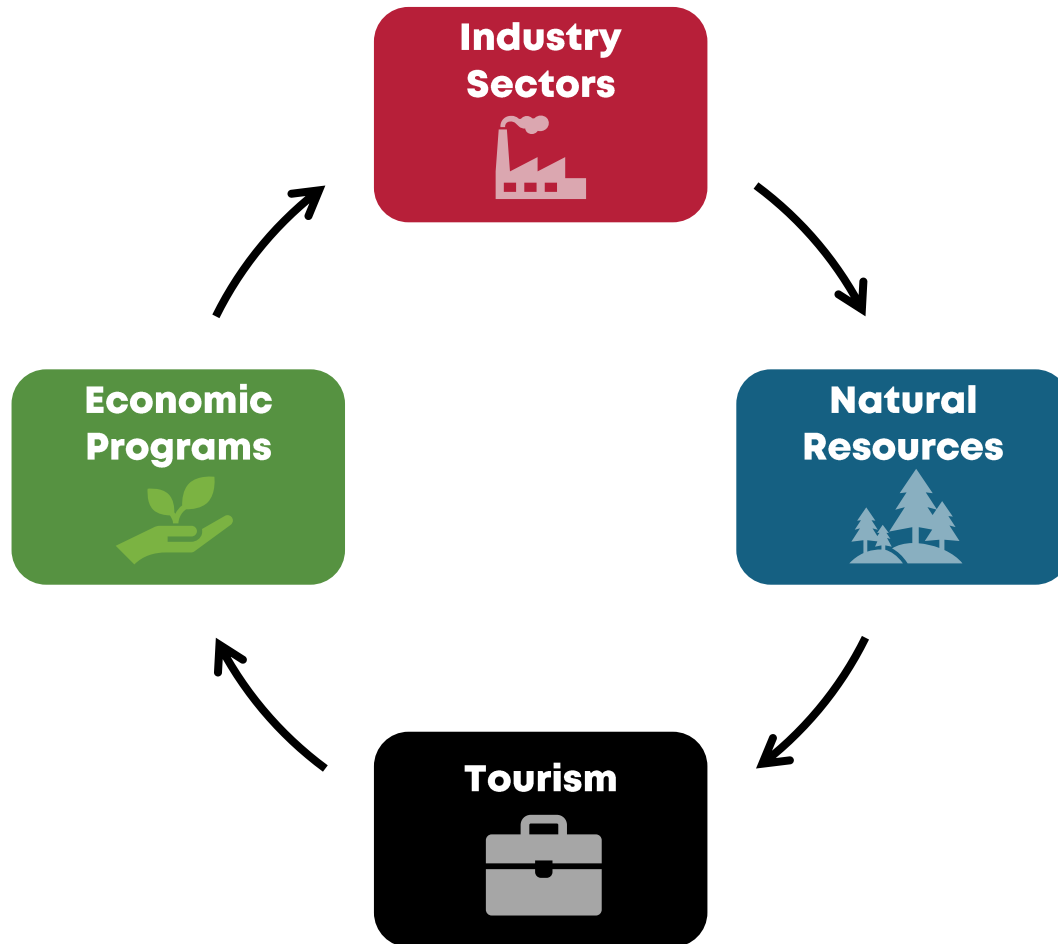
Eagle Mine closure and Copperwood Mine uncertainties threaten high-wage jobs and may increase out-migration.

## Housing and Energy Strains

Housing shortages and rising energy costs add pressure on workforce retention and community stability.



# Economic Drivers & Opportunities





# Economic Realities of Tourism



## Economic Impact

Tourism contributes **\$1.6 billion annually** to the U.P. economy, accounting for **5.5% of Michigan's visitor spending**.



## Visitor Statistics

Pictured Rocks had over **910,000 visitors in 2024**, while Isle Royale saw around **29,000 visits in 2023**, boosting local economies.



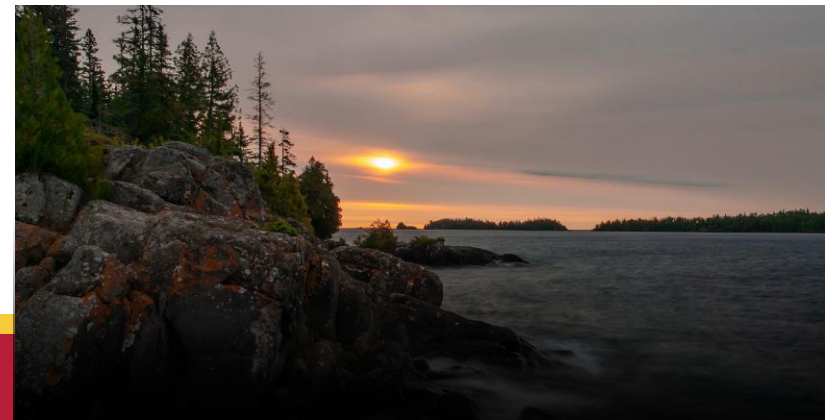
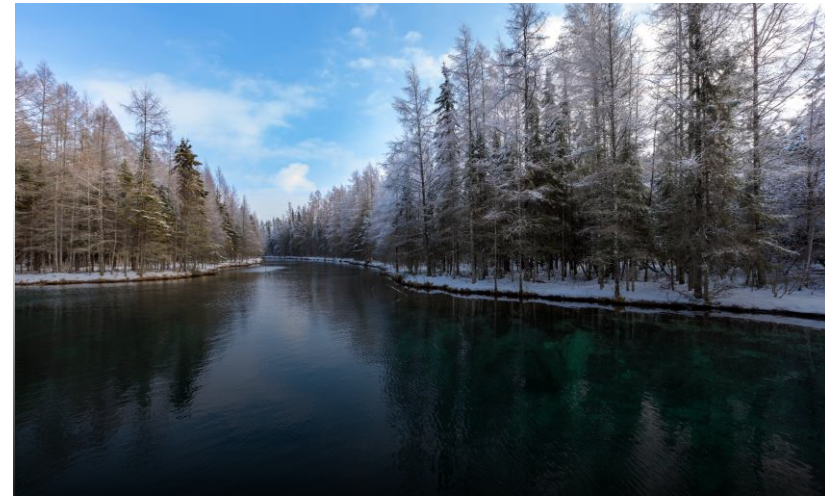
## Seasonal Employment Challenges

Seasonal tourism creates jobs but poses challenges like workforce continuity and housing shortages in peak seasons.



## Strategic Solutions

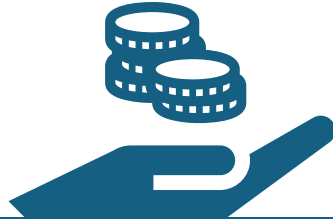
Strategies include **off-season training and infrastructure investment** to balance tourism benefits and mitigate volatility.



# Economic Programs



A **for-profit seed fund** that would be a complement to our economic development seed fund, further signaling to innovators and entrepreneurs that the Upper Peninsula is leading rural communities with early-stage funding.



A **first-of-its-kind philanthropic foundation** seeded with a significant private sector investment that will be focused on economic and community development opportunities and hopefully inspire charitable, strategic investment from across the region.



A **dynamic vision that would engage higher education** with a real and focused investment to improve the quality of life in rural communities and create solutions for rural challenges through collaborative partnerships and cutting-edge research.



# Strategies for Workforce/Economic Stability



Wraparound-first WIOA Execution



Flexible work for 65+



Career change bridges



Medicaid triage system



Focus on Youth receiving work-based learning opportunities





# Current Activities Making a Difference



## **Going PRO Talent Fund**

The Going PRO Talent Fund is a highly effective way to train and upskill workers to assist business growth.



## **Partnerships with Labor Organizations**

We've been successful with creative ways to attract young people into skilled trades, creating on-ramps into registered apprenticeships through Summer Trades Camps and Construction Connect.



## **Non-traditional apprenticeship pathways**

Our efforts developing non-traditional apprenticeships is building the talent pipelines to help U.P. employers thrive.





# Thank you!

**Debb Brunell, CEO**  
Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!  
[dbrunell@upmichiganworks.org](mailto:dbrunell@upmichiganworks.org)  
906-399-5156

---

Please visit [www.UPMichiganWorks.org](http://www.UPMichiganWorks.org) for more information. Follow us on social media at [@UPMichiganWorks](https://www.instagram.com/UPMichiganWorks).

**Sources:**

- W.E.Upjohn Institute for Employment Research presentation to InvestUP CEO Summit. Dr. Iryna Lendel, Sr. Director of Regional Economic and Community Development
- Beyond the Buzz, Lightcast, 2025 – this report highlights the effects of AI on Marketing, Public Relations, and Science & Research

