



FALL 2016

# Revitalizing the Spirit

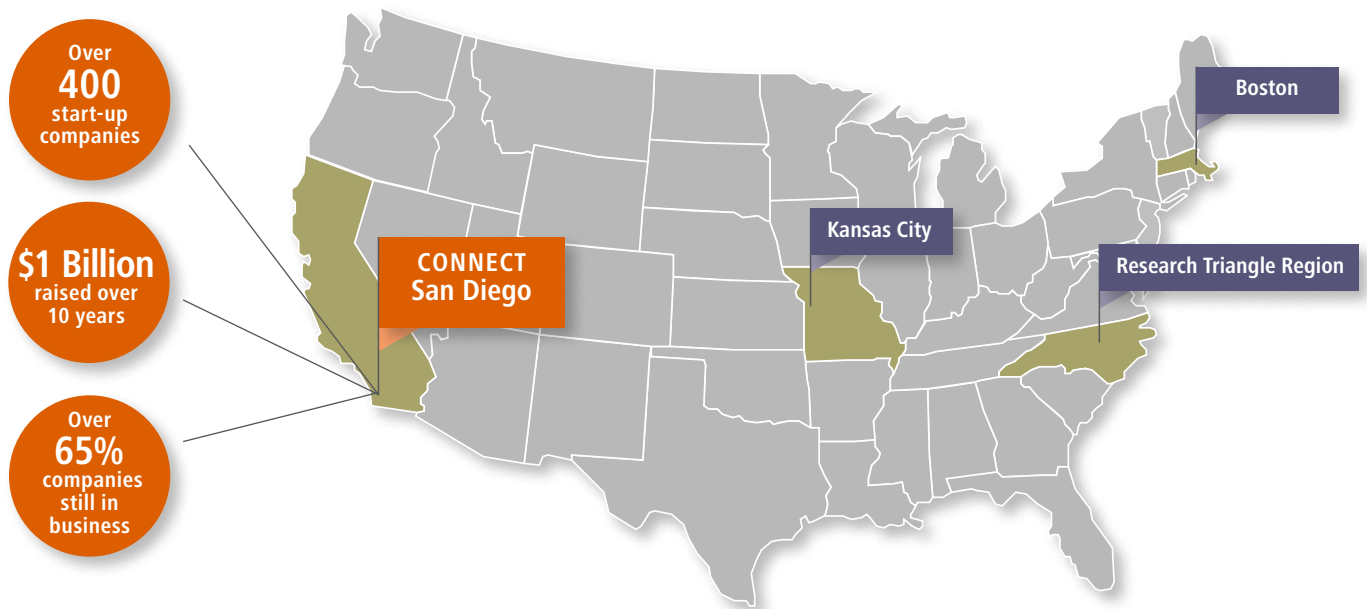
A Summary Report from the Entrepreneurship Working Group

# Our legacy.

West Michigan has a rich history of entrepreneurship, and not just since that concept has gained great prominence in the digital era. Think of the entrepreneurial spirit that launched Steelcase, Amway, Perrigo, Autocam, American Seating, Shaw Walker, X-Rite, Herman Miller, and a long list of many other companies that have started and flourished here. That entrepreneurial spirit seems indigenous to our region, and it's a very precious attribute to preserve and grow.

In recent years, however, our flourishing entrepreneurial spirit has seemed to slow. There has been no shortage of new ideas and new passion for launching businesses and organizations, but navigating the challenges of being entrepreneurial has seemed to become even more complex, sometimes more confusing. Ironically, there are now more resources than ever to support that start-up spirit. Those resources, however, have not always been well coordinated and easily understood. There has been a lag in our entrepreneurial legacy.

Business leaders detected this lag. Convened by Talent 2025, an Entrepreneurship Working Group took a careful and strategic look at our legacy of launching new enterprises to discover what we could do to rekindle the passion for start-ups, and to make it as easy as possible for new enterprises to start and sustain their presence in our region.



## Searching for Samples of Success

The effort to revitalize entrepreneurship in our region began by benchmarking with the most entrepreneurial areas of our country. The Working Group targeted cities such as Boston, San Diego, Kansas City, as well as the region known as the Research Triangle in North Carolina. That examination revealed that San Diego might be an ideal example for benchmarking this revitalization effort. A look beyond the region's often-noted idyllic climate revealed some significant achievements.

Through 2013, the Connect organization in San Diego had over 400 start-up companies, and in just over ten years their region has raised over \$1Billion, and over 65% of those companies are still in business today. The Entrepreneurship Working Group visited San Diego and heard repeatedly that Connect was successful because of intentional collaboration to create an agile and comprehensive ecosystem of resources to support entrepreneurship.

## Steps to a Solution

Armed with these insights, the Entrepreneurship Working Group tackled the task of replicating this connected, entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### Audit

The first step required an audit of the many and various structures and organizations and processes that support entrepreneurship. This step uncovered one of the crucial challenges for revitalizing entrepreneurship: the disconnect-  
edness of resources and considerable redundancy in support services. In addition, the audit process revealed that entrepreneurs struggled to understand which support service was intended to serve what purpose.

### Advocate

The Working Group successfully advocated in Lansing with Lakeshore Advantage to increase the number of state recognized entrepreneurship zones – Smart Zones. As a result Holland established the third Smart Zone in West Michigan (others are in Grand Rapids and Muskegon).

### Consolidate

It was clear that entrepreneurs in our region would benefit from a consolidation of resources and a clearer promotion of how those resources can be leveraged. As a result, eMerge West Michigan and GR Current merged within a revamped Start Garden entity, effective April 1st, 2016. This streamlining of support services is a major step toward creating a vibrant ecosystem for innovators and revitalizing the region's entrepreneurial spirit.

## Tracking Success

The efforts of the Talent 2025 Entrepreneurship Working Group have made and continue to make a difference. There is a marked increase in the financial capital available for start-up activity in the region, one of the crucial engines of entrepreneurship. In addition, local entrepreneurs are validating the importance of streamlined and consolidated support services, as well as access to the region's Smart Zones. And significant efforts have been made to expand the number and quality of mentoring services, ensuring that entrepreneurs benefit from the expertise that has powered others in our region.

These successes are proof that the Talent 2025 role of illuminating gaps, evaluating solutions, and advocating for leading practices is working. Talent 2025 will continue to track a variety to measures of our region's entrepreneurial spirit.

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#### **About Talent 2025**

Talent 2025 is a catalyst for enhancing the integrated talent development system for West Michigan. Composed of nearly 100 CEOs from the region's 13 counties, the organization strives to be a driving force for an ongoing supply of world-class talent by convening leaders and organizations who will help shape a thriving economy.