

**ABSTRACT: Workforce Innovation Fund Grants: SGA/DFA-13-06**

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research located in Kalamazoo, Michigan is the lead applicant in the Southwest Michigan Employer Resource Network-Expanded (SWMERN-E) project. Areas served will counties in Southwest Michigan: Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Calhoun, Barry and Branch. Funding will be sought in the amount of \$3,000,000 for the total project, with \$450,000 designated strictly to evaluation and \$2,550,000 to the project itself. This project will be Project Type A: New and Untested Ideas.

Employers throughout Southwest Michigan have seen particular challenges in recruiting and retaining an engaged and skilled workforce across all sectors. To target the retention piece of this issue an Employer Resource Network (ERN) was developed and implemented in early 2012 for Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties in Michigan, two connecting counties in Southwest Michigan.

The goal of an Employer Resource Network (ERN) is to bring together small to mid-size employers to create a joint venture to link and leverage talent development resources most effectively to target this problem of retaining their workforce. The unique feature of an ERN is that participating businesses pay membership fees that are used to fund a case manager, referred to as a Success Coach, from the public human services system or workforce development system to locate on-site at each business. Participating employers expect to experience lower turnover rates and lower subsequent hiring costs, reduced costs and hassles associated with worker tardiness and absenteeism, and improved productivity.

The SWMERN-E project will focus on improving the current two county ERN by expanding the region to cover all counties within two workforce development areas (referred to as Michigan

Works! Agencies): Kalamazoo and St. Joseph counties are one Michigan Works! Agency and Calhoun, Barry, Branch is another Michigan Works! Agency.

The second piece improvement will be focused on solutions to the difficulty employers are experiencing is recruiting an engaged and skilled workforce. The current ERN does not address recruiting. By incorporating this as an improvement the ERN will not only be stronger connected to the Workforce Development System, but will also assist the employers in recruiting better suited employees.

Evaluation: The evaluation will be conducted over a five-year period, beginning with the development of a detailed evaluation plan and concluding with a comprehensive summary report and executive briefing. Between these milestones, the evaluation team will be actively engaged in collecting, reviewing, and synthesizing data from a variety of sources. A brief summary of the primary tasks, activities, and timeline for the evaluation is provided in the evaluation narrative.

Key Research questions will be designed to look at; ERN Model Elements and Fidelity, ERN Network Development, ERN Employer Interaction and Governance, ERN Partners, Public Workforce Agency Role, ERN Provision of Services, Data Management and Administration, Resource Leveraging, Employer Experiences and Satisfaction, Community Partner Satisfaction with ERN, and ERN Outcomes.

Public Contact Information: [www.upjohn.org](http://www.upjohn.org), [www.michiganworks14.org](http://www.michiganworks14.org)