SEMCA MICHIGAN WORKS!

SEMCA FINAL REPORT

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TO

Gregory Pitoniak, CEO
SEMCA Michigan Works!

FROM

Scott Dzurka
DZ Strategy Management
sdzurka@gmail.com

Kelly Stec
Research to Practice Consulting, LLC
ksteccconsulting@gmail.com

Executive Summary

In summer 2024, the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA) began work on a new three-year strategic plan to further the progress made under its 2021-2024 plan. As the organization emerged from a time of responding to the multiple workforce challenges driven by COVID-19, it became critical to develop strategic and action planning documents that are cognizant of the new economy and emphasize the vital workforce development role SEMCA plays in Wayne and Monroe Counties. To assist SEMCA in this process, DZ Strategy Management and Research to Practice Consulting (the project team) were hired to collect environmental data, facilitate sessions with SEMCA Board and Executive Leadership, and report on the final goals and strategies determined by SEMCA's leaders.

In early fall 2024, the project team completed a number of sessions with Board members, staff, and key stakeholders to generate an environmental overview of SEMCA and its customers. Data collected throughout this process is available in the Appendix. Using this data, the project team then met with SEMCA Board members and Executive Leadership to generate overarching goals and determine the key activities needed to meet them. The objectives and key action areas for the first year reflect some shift in focus to reflect significant changes in policy and the business landscape in our region.

SEMCA leadership determined the following goals and objectives for the organization in the years 2025-2028. These goals were approved at the April 2025 SEMCA Board meeting.

Increase SEMCA brand awareness through marketing and outreach

Objective 1: SEMCA is recognized as a critical and valuable partner
Objective 2: Showcase SEMCA Michigan Works! competencies as a high-performing workforce development agency
Objective 3: Create opportunities to regularly connect with policymakers

Strengthen service delivery with industry and education partnerships

Objective 1: Alignment of business services to industry/Business services restructuring for greater efficiency and impact
Objective 2: Strengthen talent across the region through increased collaboration with educational partners
Objective 3: Improve customer services with an increased focus on SEMCA experience for all customers, through data, training, and increased staff support

Optimize operations to increase efficiency and effectiveness

Objective 1: Scenario planning to address potential changes
Objective 2: Identify opportunities to streamline services and manage costs effectively
Objective 3: Diversify unrestricted funding while allocating resources strategically

Design and Data

At the outset of this project, SEMCA leadership indicated an interest in gaining feedback on SEMCA's services and future priorities from a wide variety of stakeholders including staff, Board members, and service partners throughout the region. The following section describes the methods of data collection used.

Victory Circle. On September 18, SEMCA Board members kicked off strategic planning by completing a victory circle exercise. Participants were asked to mentally picture what they want to be celebrating about SEMCA in the year 2030. Together, they developed answers that centered on themes of **employee-employer relationships, partnership, funding needs, education-industry integration, and SEMCA awareness and recognition.** A full list of responses can be found in the Appendix. Based on these themes, SEMCA Board membership and leadership determined that the overall themes aligned with the organization's current mission and vision.

Focus Groups. Between October 1 and 10, 2024, the project team completed a series of five focus groups to gather feedback from a wide variety of SEMCA stakeholders. One, held on October 8, was a session to gather staff feedback on the development of the strategic plan. The other four included diverse participant groups of SEMCA staff, contractors, community partners and Board members. During these sessions, participants were asked about SEMCA's role in the community, strengths, challenges, opportunities for growth, and areas of prioritization for the future. In total, nearly 100 people completed a focus group, including approximately 70 SEMCA staff participants on the 8th and 21 substantive participants in the other groups. Emergent themes from these conversations are available in the Appendix.

Key Informant Interviews. Throughout Fall 2024, the project team completed eight interviews with individual stakeholders seen as holding key historical and contextual insights for use in the planning process. The same general format was used in the interviews as in the focus groups, with participants being asked about SEMCA's role in the community, strengths, challenges, opportunities for growth, and areas of prioritization for the future. Due to the small sample size, themes are collapsed across interviews and focus groups to help preserve participant anonymity. A full list of emergent themes from these conversations is available in the Appendix. Key needs for the organization emerged as follows:

Employer Engagement and Collaboration	• Overcome challenges around employer participation and (relative) disengagement, need for "hand-holding" with partners • Strengthen connections between employers and education partners • Help organizations improve onboarding processes, workplace culture, and overall environments to reduce turnover
Career Awareness and Education	• Emphasize career exploration and awareness opportunities for youth • Address the interest gap between job availability and knowledge/uptake • Continue to align and support dual enrollment, apprenticeship, and other workforce learning programs

Funding and Administrative Support	• Seek flexible funding and administrative dollars to reduce strain and improve coordination • Address funding shortages impacting SEMCA workforce size and capacity • Strengthen relationship-building ability with employers, partners, students, and customers
Program Equity, Flexibility, and Communications	• Divide programs and resources equitably vs. equally — participants indicated things can be "too fair" • Improve communication networks to make sure information sharing reaches all intended recipients

Strategic Planning Board Session. After collecting data through the Victory Circle, interviews, and focus groups, the project team met with the Board on October 29th for a goal-generating session using *Technology of Participation®* techniques. During this meeting, Board members were presented with an overview of the data collected. They then completed a situational assessment using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) framework. Board members then completed a consensus-building exercise that guided them from individually brainstorming ideas for meeting SEMCA's mission and vision to full-group discussion on how to categorize and prioritize these ideas. Results of the consensus build are available in the Appendix and served as the primary framework for developing the strategic goals and action plan with SEMCA's executive team.

Strategic and Action Planning Sessions. Using the outcomes of the strategic planning session with the Board, the project team then met with members of the SEMCA Executive Leadership team to further refine goals, strategies, objectives, and activities for the organization moving into the future. The results of these conversations make up the Strategic Plan, below, and its related action plans, available in the Appendix. Moving forward, the action plans will serve as guidance for the staff and Board to identify and complete necessary tasks to advance objectives within the strategic plan. These action plans will be reviewed and refined on a regular basis to keep focus on key areas and measure progress.

Strategic Plan

The SEMCA strategic plan presents a more narrowly focused version of the consensus build exercise from the October Board session. Goals and objectives were determined by the SEMCA executive team and reflect the current contextual needs of the organization while maintaining Board member priorities.

Goal 1: Increase SEMCA brand awareness through marketing and outreach

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Goal 2: Strengthen service delivery with industry and education partnerships

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Goal 3: Optimize operations to increase efficiency and effectiveness

- Objective 1: Scenario planning to address potential changes
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Appendix

Note: Answers here are presented as themes and summaries unless used directly in quotes.

Appendix 1: Victory Circle

Prompt: It's 2030 and CNN has landed on SEMCA's front lawn. What are they here to celebrate?

- Employers found every employee they need
- We achieved 60% of the population holding postsecondary credentials
- Partnerships to provide innovative services and results
- Match individual goals with employee needs
- Continued integration of career opportunities for K-12 and adult learners
- No clients fall through the cracks due to strong communications and partnerships
- Identify and adapt to emerging workforce requirements
- Exceed all defined goals for service area
- Collaboration and breaking down barriers
- Employers experience SEMCA as a one-stop shop for all talent needs
- Valuing lifelong learning
- Increased awareness and accessibility of resources in the community
- Decreased equity gaps
- Everyone knows our name

Participant-Identified Themes

- Employee-employer relationships
- Partnership
- Funding needs
- Education-industry integration
- SEMCA awareness and recognition

Feedback on Mission and Vision Statements

- Innovation/flexibility are embedded in mission
- Statements are comprehensive and tie in the whole career model
- Lifelong learning is addressed
- Recognition of the talent pipeline

Appendix 2: Environmental Scan

R2P and DZ Strategy Management conducted a series of discussion groups and interviews to better understand thoughts about SEMCA's programs, services, and future directions to help build its strategic plan. The following themes were identified from those conversations. Themes may appear more than once, reflecting the interconnected nature of SEMCA's work and the diverse perspectives of participants.

Understanding SEMCA's Role

Core Employment Services Provider

- SEMCA is recognized as a key provider of workforce development services. MI Works centers are seen as a central hub for connecting people with jobs, training opportunities, and financial resources (e.g., unemployment, apprenticeships).

Direct Engagement with the Community

- SEMCA plays a significant role in community events, career exploration (e.g., Manufacturing Day), and youth services. SEMCA's presence in the community is important for increasing awareness about training programs and job opportunities, particularly for underserved populations such as veterans and people with disabilities.

Connector Between Various Stakeholders

- SEMCA is seen as a bridge between key sectors—education, businesses, government, and nonprofits. It acts as a convener and ambassador, bringing together different groups to collaborate on workforce development and economic growth initiatives.
- SEMCA leverages its infrastructure to facilitate partnerships and deliver programs effectively. Respondents highlighted SEMCA's role in initiating projects like apprenticeships, supporting training programs, and building relationships between community partners and employers. The ability to quickly and efficiently stand up programs as a result of the established infrastructure was also discussed.

Employer Engagement

- SEMCA connects employers to resources, programs, and training opportunities, playing a significant role in employee development and helping businesses grow. Some participants expressed concern that SEMCA has become more employer-driven, focusing heavily on meeting the needs of local businesses.

Training and Apprenticeships

- SEMCA is praised for its role in providing training, developing apprenticeships, and introducing new growth opportunities for workers. Programs like pre-apprenticeships and stackable credentials are seen as important steps in creating career mobility for job seekers.

Focus on Wraparound Services and Holistic Support

- SEMCA provides comprehensive support to job seekers beyond job placement, such as transportation assistance and resources for expunging criminal records. Their role extends

to offering multi-generational support for families in need, helping break barriers that could prevent sustained employment.

Innovation and Responsiveness

- SEMCA is recognized for its openness to innovation, with examples like WayneLINC, which addresses barriers to employment and workforce entry. The organization adapts to economic and budgetary changes, ensuring continuity in services even in times of budget cuts.

Financial Stewardship and Program Efficiency

- SEMCA is noted for its fiscal responsibility, ensuring that funds are allocated wisely and programs are adapted to meet changing needs. Their anticipatory planning for budget reductions demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and continued support despite financial challenges.
- Focus group respondents noted difficulties in articulating SEMCA's full range of services, which makes it challenging for different audiences to fully grasp the support SEMCA offers.

Identifying Key Needs

Employer Engagement and Collaboration

- Employer engagement is repeatedly identified as a critical issue, with a notable struggle to get more employers involved in workforce programs. Events often see low participation despite their usefulness.
- There's a need for more connection between employers and educational institutions to ensure students develop the skills needed in the workforce and wherein employers can better express their skill demands.
- The overall workforce development landscape could benefit from more hands-on support and "handholding" for employer partners, helping them better understand generational differences in work values and assisting with retention issues.
- Longstanding local business management and leadership practices are also seen as contributing to turnover rates in some areas, with organizations needing help improving onboarding processes, workplace culture, and creating a more acceptable, desirable work environment.

Career Awareness and Education

- Respondents emphasize the need to build opportunities for career exploration and awareness among youth to address talent pipeline issues across the region.
- There's a sense that students aren't interested in certain types of jobs, such as those in manufacturing, due to a lack of awareness or interest. SEMCA should continue to find ways to address this interest gap, perhaps through assisting employers in reassessing or redesigning job duties and encouraging individuals and groups to champion trade professions.
- Dual enrollment programs and apprenticeships are identified as critical tools in preparing young people for workforce demands, but they need better alignment and support.

Interviewees also discussed the idea of a K-14 system, and focus group participants noted a need for SEMCA to continue these offerings to fill skills and interest gaps.
- Interviews also highlight lifelong learning opportunities to prepare students for real-world employment and encourage ongoing skills development for all job seekers.

Funding and Administrative Support
- Respondents mention that despite the creation of new programs, there is often no new money to support them, placing a strain on existing resources.
- Staffing challenges due to reduced funding mean fewer staff available to carry out administrative and direct service roles, increasing workload and impacting service delivery.
- More administrative dollars and flexibility are needed to ensure that staff can effectively manage both new and ongoing initiatives.
- Staffing shortages hinder relationship-building with employers. This, in turn, diminishes the ability to establish those processes that both facilitate more in-depth connections between employers and students and allow for more direct involvement from employers in innovation around barrier reduction.
- Interviewees specifically emphasize barriers faced by job seekers (e.g. childcare, housing, transportation), highlighting a need for more flexible, supportive funding to address these challenges. This was also a core theme of the staff focus group.

Equity and Program Flexibility
- The idea that programs should be equitably, rather than equally, spread is raised, with some noting that certain programs may not make sense for specific regions.
- Respondents also see a gap in internal communication and engagement between SEMCA leadership and program staff, which can affect the implementation of programs at the local level.

Improvement Opportunities

Increasing Thought Leadership and Strengthening Branding
- There is a desire to see SEMCA step into more of a thought leadership role in workforce development. Respondents mention that workforce development organizations generally lag in this area, but they are particularly successful when they can become thought leaders. This may require a higher-level intentional synthesis of emerging issues and communicating stronger opinions on what suggested strategies for resolution.
- The organization could strengthen its public image, rebranding itself as a resource for everyone, not just the unemployed, and increasing its visibility as a key player in workforce and economic development.
- Respondents feel that SEMCA could be more effective in sharing data and trends in talent and industry needs, especially around emerging fields like semiconductors and EVs.

Compensation and Staffing Challenges
- Staff and contractor compensation is a significant challenge, with respondents mentioning that prescribed salary rates can be 20-30% below market, making it difficult to attract and

retain quality staff. This directly impacts the organization's ability to affect significant positive outcomes.
- There are ongoing issues with staffing shortages due to funding cuts, which place additional administrative burdens on the existing team and impact service delivery. Respondents emphasize the need for more funding for staffing (including contracted staff) and administrative dollars.

Communication and Coordination Across Services

- Communication across different entities and services is seen as lacking, especially between Michigan Rehabilitation Services, K-12 schools, and other agencies. This limits the coordination of services that could support students with disabilities or other barriers.
- Respondents mention the need for better internal and external communication about the resources available, especially between SEMCA leadership, staff, and contractors delivering services at American Jobs Centers.

Barrier Removal and Support Services

- Barrier removal (e.g., transportation, childcare, housing) remains a critical area. Respondents suggest a deep dive into data to better understand and address these barriers.
- There's an emphasis on preventing barriers before they arise, particularly for youth. This could involve supporting young people early to avoid justice involvement and other challenges.
- Mental health, housing, and legal supports are identified as new barriers that SEMCA should focus on addressing as part of its workforce development efforts.
- Interviews specifically address continuing to support multi-generational approaches to poverty alleviation.

Youth Engagement and Representation

- Respondents consistently mention the importance of youth engagement in workforce development planning. They suggest involving youth in focus groups or including their perspective on the workforce development board to ensure that services reflect the needs of younger generations.
- Youth should be actively involved in career exploration and receive intentional exposure to multiple career and education pathways to better prepare them for the workforce.

Marketing and Awareness Campaigns

- SEMCA could benefit from increased marketing efforts to raise awareness about its services. Respondents suggest using low-cost marketing strategies like newsletters, podcasts, e-flyers, and social media platforms to communicate available resources and programs.
- The organization should focus on improving its brand awareness across Michigan Works and emphasize that its services are available to people at every stage of their careers, not just to those currently unemployed.

Partnerships and Community Involvement

- Building and maintaining strong partnerships with other organizations is seen as a critical focus area. Respondents suggest that SEMCA should continue expanding its role in community events and partner with larger organizations to increase visibility and resources.
- There is a desire to increase support for minority and immigrant communities with language-specific resources. Also, suggest setting up satellite sites in community centers and strengthening partnerships with local organizations like ACCESS in Dearborn to serve diverse populations more effectively.
- There's a suggestion to train all SEMCA staff to act as spokespeople for the organization, helping to spread the word about the services available through community interactions.
- Small business support is also highlighted, with respondents suggesting that SEMCA could provide more resources and training (e.g., QuickBooks training) to help build stronger communities.

Strategic Conversations and Technology and Data Utilization

- Respondents emphasize the need for strategic dialogue with partners and frontline workers. Quarterly meetings that bring all stakeholders together (including staff, partners, and community members) to openly discuss challenges and opportunities could help SEMCA better align its services. There is a particular focus here on frontline staff who have a view from the ground and an emphasis on open, honest conversations.
- Data-driven decision-makingis seen as crucial, particularly when addressing barriers like transportation and childcare. Utilizing multi-year job forecasting data could help SEMCA stabilize funding and better plan for the future.
- Interviewees suggest exploring advanced recruitment technologies including AI and the "open talent economy" in order to recruit unemployed, underemployed, and those looking to upskill.

Advocacy and Funding

- Some respondents emphasized the need to balance employer-focused initiatives with a deeper understanding of worker needs, especially in terms of creating jobs with livable wages and addressing current reality by advocating for self-sufficiency wages in the region.
- There was some concern raised that the metrics set by the state and federal government and used to determine service availability/delivery may not be metrics that are in everyone's best interests. Specifically, work towards career awareness and meeting employer needs may require broader measures of success.
    - It was also suggested by interviewees that, while workforce development generally enjoys bipartisan support, there may be certain political groups specifically that prioritize efficiency metrics which may fail to recognize and limit resources for people starting from disadvantaged positions. There will be a need for SEMCA to navigate balancing efficiency with equitable support.
- There's a strong call for SEMCA to lobby for increased state funding to support workforce development, particularly to address gaps in administration and staffing. Respondents also

suggest advocating for unrestricted dollars to allow for more flexibility in advertising and operational needs.
    - Additionally, interviewees noted that SEMCA can work to educate legislators on workforce needs and advocate for policies that consider local challenges and nuances in resource distribution.
- Interviews specifically highlight the need to address gaps created by non-formula-based funding and the competitive grant environment, which can leave certain areas underserved.
- Engaging with national training advocates like the National Skills Coalition could amplify SEMCA's influence on policy-related funding.
- SEMCA's role as a "wrecking ball for barriers" should continue to be emphasized, with more funding directed toward helping job seekers overcome both traditional and new barriers to employment.

Challenges to Achieving Goals

Note: themes here are more distilled due to duplication of ideas

Brand Awareness and Public Understanding

- Many people perceive MI Works as only an unemployment agency, and there's a lack of clarity about the breadth of services SEMCA offers.

Employer Engagement

- The same few companies engage repeatedly. It's difficult to get new industry players involved. Additionally, some employers view workforce programs as bogged down by bureaucracy and not worth the effort.
- Some participants reported that feedback they receive suggests that working with SEMCA is sometimes perceived as complex by employers.

Political and Legislative Uncertainty and Funding Instability

- Unpredictable funding, particularly from federal sources, is a recurring issue. This affects the sustainability of SEMCA's programs, staffing, and ability to launch new initiatives.
- Interviewees repeatedly mention political concerns, including uncertainty around the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) renewal and how changes in political control could impact funding and restrict services. They suggest that advocating for workforce priorities and maintaining bipartisan support are essential.

Internal Staffing Challenges and Pay Discrepancies

- Understaffing and staff turnover (including among contractors) are significant concerns, exacerbated by below-market wages and the looming increase in minimum wage without corresponding increases in funding.
- There's a growing need for staff to handle customers in crisis. Staff are not adequately equipped to deal with clients facing significant mental health challenges, which can make job placements difficult. Respondents highlighted addressing client mental health challenges as a critical need that current staff cannot accommodate.

Virtual vs. In-Person Services

- The shift towards virtual services post-pandemic presents challenges in finding a balance between in-person and online interactions. Many customers still prefer in-person interactions, while others have adapted to virtual services.

Technological Advancements and Threats

- The fast pace of technological advancements, particularly in mobility and EV manufacturing, poses challenges. Can happen that by the time a solution is developed, it's obsolete. There is a need to get research going sooner to get innovation started.
- Emerging technologies, such as AI and deep fakes, pose new challenges in verifying clients and staying current with tech needs.
- Different programs use various systems for data collection, which complicates reporting and coordination. Duplicative requirements for administration and reporting due to incongruent data systems increase administrative pressure on staff and contractors and reduce their ability to effectively engage their core service populations.
- Administrative needs, such as data reporting and safety/security improvements, are underfunded. In particular, there's a need for capital improvements in technology and safety systems, but current funding doesn't support this.

Talent Shortages and Population Decline

- The state faces a declining population, an aging workforce, and talent shortages. There's a need to attract and retain younger workers while motivating them to pursue careers that support economic growth. Strategies are needed to attract out-of-state talent and encourage workers to stay in the region, especially as the baby boomer generation retires.

Strategic Focus Areas

Increase Brand Awareness and Communication

- Many stakeholders believe that SEMCA could do a better job of communicating its programs, services, and successes to the broader community, schools, and employers. Improve outreach and branding efforts, focusing on increasing awareness among schools, businesses, and individuals.
- Ensure consistent communication across all centers and celebrate successful programs to attract new partners and participants.

Strengthen K-12 and Postsecondary Partnerships

- Enhance Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and better publicize these opportunities to high school students, especially those not pursuing college.
- Partner with unions and community colleges (CCs) to ensure articulated credits and seamless transitions from high school programs to college or apprenticeship programs.
- There is repeated emphasis by multiple respondents on work-based learning opportunities.
- Increase SEMCA's presence in schools and at early college events.

- Take steps to position SEMCA to provide a regional picture of labor markets data to better allow various stakeholders to align their individual needs assessments into a holistic focus to inform programming decisions.

Expand Youth Programs and Career Pathways

- There is a continued need to increase career awareness and exploration for youth with a focus on leaving students with actionable career plans.
- Creative partnerships can help reach youth and other underserved populations, such as returning citizens, neurodivergent individuals, and people with substance use disorders (SUD).
- Ensure youth understand SEMCA's role and the opportunities available to them.
- Emphasize programs for nontraditional labor and disability inclusion, learning from best practices in other regions.

Improve Employer Engagement and Partnerships

- Employer engagement is critical, but some businesses feel disconnected from SEMCA's services or overwhelmed by bureaucracy. There is a need to bring more employers into SEMCA's network and streamline employer-related processes.
- Increased reporting requirements and administrative burden have eliminated the ability to have dedicated staff for requisite relationship-building, but this time investment is a necessary component of success.
- Work closely with business associations and chambers of commerce to better understand and collectively address skill needs, thus creating a more unified approach to workforce development.

Staff Support and Engagement

- SEMCA should focus on improving staff engagement, ensuring that employees and contractors feel supported and that their feedback is valued. Respondents mentioned the need for SEMCA to better engage its contractors and staff, noting concerns about top-down decision-making and a perceived lack of feedback from employees. Additionally, the burnout rate among customer-facing staff was noted, with some suggesting more support for SEMCA employees who handle difficult customer interactions.
- There is a disconnect between the pressures to meet administrative goals and the focus on service delivery. Clarity in management and consistent operational priorities across SEMCA centers is needed. Respondents suggest aligning performance metrics to quality over quantity, allowing SEMCA to focus on impactful outcomes rather than mere goal-checking.

Enhance Mental Health and Whole-Person Services

- As SEMCA focuses on "saving lives," the mental health needs of participants are becoming more urgent. There's a growing need for integrating mental health professionals and services into workforce development. Consider hiring mental health professionals or partnering with agencies like Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network to provide holistic services.

- SEMCA could also focus on helping individuals in crisis take advantage of available services.

Enhance Workforce Data and Forecasting

- There's a need for better alignment of workforce data across various sectors (e.g., K-12, community colleges, industry), as well as the need to forecast emerging job markets, such as those in the electric vehicle (EV) sector.
- Take advantage of collaborations with Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) to streamline labor market analysis and needs assessments.
- SEMCA can act as a bridge between sectors to ensure that workforce development efforts are based on accurate, sufficiently broad/cross-sector, forward-looking data.

Focus on Inclusivity and Equity

- Ensuring that SEMCA's programming is designed from the ground up to be inclusive and equity-driven is key to maximizing its community impact. SEMCA should ask itself whether it is dismantling or upholding systems of power.
- Focus on bottom-up programming decisions, where authentic community voices drive the services offered.
- Create an intentional whole-person focus on employee-driven services and ensure that decisions made align with dismantling systemic barriers.

Secure Sustainable and Diversified Funding

- Unstable or decreasing funding is a significant challenge. SEMCA should work to find alternative funding sources to continue providing comprehensive services.
- Continue to diversify funding sources by exploring non-federal funding options, such as corporate partnerships and foundation grants.
- Focus on securing funding that has fewer restrictions and aligns with SEMCA's core services.
- Make fundraising a priority, explore philanthropic support, and create dedicated funds for high-demand, short-term credentials, especially as industry demands shift toward credentials over degrees.
- Advocate for policies that simplify regulatory demands and align funding with high-demand skills rather than solely educational pursuits like free community college.

Insights for Future Planning

Note: Many of these also reflect similar responses to previous questions

- Improve communication (internal and external) and promote positive regional messaging to engage businesses and communities. This includes encouraging messaging that highlights the strengths of the workforce in the region rather than focusing on gaps or negative labor issues. If we can amplify positive storytelling, that could help draw businesses to the area and increase their willingness to engage/partner with SEMCA.
- Increase brand awareness through marketing efforts and storytelling.

- Foster a culture of innovation by encouraging SEMCA leadership to take risks and be forward-thinking.
- Enhance staffing support through funding, training, involvement in decision-making, and creating feedback mechanisms. Ensuring stability and retention of staff and fostering connections between staff, community, and leadership were areas of focus.
- Strengthen partnerships with K12 schools, MI Works agencies, and businesses to expand opportunities. Increasing sponsored tuition and tuition reimbursement programs that let people learn while they continue to work were highlighted.
- For economically disadvantaged populations (e.g., ALICE), focus on work-based learning models that allow individuals to earn income while gaining credentials that are directly relevant to employer needs. Example given: Models like Nashville's emphasize structured, evaluated work-based learning with employer input, providing real-world experience and potentially reducing the likelihood of talent leaving the area.
- Continue focusing on providing comprehensive case management and wraparound services to address common employment barriers, such as transportation, ensuring that the workforce system supports individuals' broader needs effectively.
- Explore public-private partnerships to address regional transportation barriers, such as limited transit options, which impact talent mobility and job accessibility for youth and underserved populations.
- Position SEMCA's services in familiar settings, such as libraries and community centers, to meet people where they are. SEMCA can meet people in comfortable, familiar settings, providing services in places that are more accessible and less intimidating.
- Focus on data-driven program improvements by investing in efficient metrics and data analysis.
- Pursue flexible, unrestricted funding to allow SEMCA to be more adaptive and remove workforce participation barriers. Unrestricted funding is raised several times to allow SEMCA the flexibility to allocate resources where they are most needed, including to bridge services.

Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement

Expand Engagement at Community Events

- SEMCA is seen as doing well with community events, but respondents noted that these events can feel segmented or narrowly focused. There may be an opportunity to broaden the invitation list to include more stakeholders, such as employers or other community organizations.

Improve Communication Across the Network

- There is an opportunity for more collaboration between entities to reduce duplicative efforts by finding ways to share what's going on across the entire SEMCA network/ecosystem. Respondents believe that streamlining communication, perhaps through mass distribution lists or collaboration platforms, could reduce overlap and ensure stakeholders are aware of all ongoing efforts.

- Stakeholders appreciate partnership-focused trainings that facilitate resource exchange, networking, and a better understanding of SEMCA's role. Continuing to develop these collaborative training exercises would build stronger relationships and open funding opportunities for stakeholders.

Consider Dedicating an entire role to Overseeing Stakeholder Engagement

- There was a suggestion to have someone at SEMCA whose dedicated role is to manage stakeholder engagement, as some tasks can get lost when people juggle multiple responsibilities.
- Respondents emphasized the importance of feedback and candid conversations with SEMCA, especially for their own strategic planning purposes. Having dedicated partner relations could help foster these conversations and ensure that feedback is bidirectional and continuous.
- Some respondents mentioned that SEMCA already has open communication lines, especially through leadership. Greg was commended for his role in forwarding information and ensuring stakeholders stay in the loop.
- Respondents also emphasized that they appreciate Greg's openness and engaging approach and also see room for deeper, more transparent discussions, especially in monthly meetings with providers. Specifically, finding a way to encourage providers to share openly would foster more genuine conversations and enhance engagement.

Consider Adopting Private Sector Service Models

- It was noted that many companies are accustomed to working with private staffing firms, and SEMCA could benefit from adopting similar professionalism, accountability, and customer service models. While acknowledging that SEMCA operates as a publicly funded entity, aligning its operations with private sector standards could improve stakeholder satisfaction.

Informative Updates and Broader Sharing

- Stakeholders want more visibility into SEMCA's ongoing and future projects. Broader communication through presentations, strategy report-outs, or progress updates would help them stay informed and allow them to share SEMCA's impact more widely.

Appendix 3: Consensus Build Results

Answers in this section are presented as they were shared during the October Board session. Ideas generated through this exercise formed the basis of the strategic plan outlined in the main body of the report. Participants first generated the ideas that make up the sub-bullets in this section, then were asked to group and name like items, resulting in seven main themes.

- Maximize brand awareness of SEMCA's workforce services
  - Flyer about SEMCA for distribution in community
  - Create SEMCA Michigan Works! messaging core services
  - Increase brand awareness through marketing and outreach
  - Focus on digital communications to engage current youth
- Innovative outreach to youth and general population
  - Community outreach
  - Connecting with youth
  - Annual partner meeting to share missions
  - Strengthen and diversify Board and governance
- Ensure inclusivity in customer programs and services
  - DEIJ–Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
  - Resources and pathways for New Americans
  - Partner with transit providers
  - Mentorship pipeline
- Strengthen career pathways with industries/educational partnerships
  - Work with community colleges and research institutions re: tech careers
  - Establish career pathway *system*
  - Create education user group
  - Increase business investment in CEAC
  - Customized training leading to hiring agreement
- Diversify and increase funding for workforce services
  - Flexible funding
  - Continue seeking nonrestricted funding
- Enhance internal operations to increase efficiency/effectiveness
  - Restructure BSR services to better engage stakeholders
  - Identify opportunities to eliminate duplicate services
  - Data evaluation
  - Be recognized leader of WD systems
  - Retention plan for SEMCA staff
- Create opportunities to regularly connect with policymakers
  - Communication advocacy with state and federal
  - Educate legislators about the WIOA reauthorization
  - Intentionally connect local state leaders to AJCs

Appendix 4: Action Plans

Goal 1: Increase SEMCA brand awareness through marketing and outreach	Q1 2025 (Jan–Mar)	Q2 2025 (Apr-June)	Q3 2025 (July–Sept)	Q4 2025 (Oct–Dec)	Future
SEMCA is recognized as a critical and valuable partner	Aim: Establish SEMCA's Value Proposition & Build Recognition	Aim: Strengthen Strategic Partnerships & Expand Presence	Aim: Deepen Engagement & Measure Perception	Aim: Consolidate Gains & Strengthen Future Initiatives	Aim: Ongoing Messaging & Website Development
Activity: Plan for 30th Anniversary Celebration (Q1 2026)		Begin planning SEMCA's 30th anniversary event by setting key goals, identifying potential partners, and securing early speaker commitments.	Continued preparation for the 30th anniversary event ensures its success as a key brand-building opportunity, where SEMCA can showcase its history, partnerships, and impact.	Finalize 30th anniversary messaging and complete preparations for the inaugural annual event in 2026.	Annual Events & Recognition: Grow the annual event into a prominent regional summit and explore opportunities for an annual awards program recognizing key partners.
Activity: Develop Messaging Documents & Website Updates for both job-seekers and employers; also experience partnering and/or administering services/programs	Success Stories: Identify/create real-world examples of SEMCA's positive impact on individuals, communities, employers, and youth.	Media Coverage Strategy: Develop a strategy to secure 2-3 media features about SEMCA's workforce development initiatives	Partner-Specific Case Studies: Sharing case studies that demonstrate successful collaborations reinforces SEMCA's results-driven approach, further enhancing its credibility. Plan Quarterly Partner Newsletter Launch for Q4: Outline the content and structure of the quarterly newsletter to keep partners informed and engaged, with a target launch in Q4.	2025 Annual Report Preparation	Continuously refine SEMCA's messaging documents and update the website to reflect evolving priorities and partnerships. Advanced Thought Leadership: Secure more speaking opportunities, panel participation, and media features to enhance SEMCA's reputation as a workforce development leader. Performance Measurement: Regularly assess brand perception through partner surveys and impact reports, using insights to strengthen SEMCA's services.

Activity: Position SEMCA as a facilitator of regional workforce solutions			Mid-Year Partner Survey Roundtable Event Execution: Hosting the planned roundtable engages partners in meaningful dialogue and positions SEMCA as a facilitator of regional workforce solutions.	Promote the Partner Resource Hub Launch	Expanded Partner Engagement: Build on existing partnerships by launching co-branded initiatives, joint marketing efforts, and resource-sharing opportunities. Craft Business-Centric Messaging: Develop messaging that highlights SEMCA as a trusted workforce solutions partner for businesses, focusing on sector-specific needs and tailored services. Digital Growth: Keep the Partner Resource Hub current and explore additional digital tools or platforms that enhance partner collaboration. These efforts are designed to help broaden the **reach**, **impact**, and **viability** of SEMCA, ensuring long-term success as a trusted partner in workforce development and grant management.
Showcase SEMCA Michigan Works! competencies as a high-performing workforce development agency	Aim: Establish SEMCA Michigan Works! Brand as trusted Resource for Businesses	Aim: Strengthen SEMCA Michigan Works! Presence as a Workforce Solutions Provider	Aim: Deepen Engagement with Employers and Showcase Results	Aim: Solidify SEMCA's Position as the Go-To Workforce Solutions Partner	

Activity: Refine Business Services Messaging	Craft clear messaging that communicates SEMCA Michigan Works! Business Services	Website Redesign with Business-Focused Solutions Launch a redesigned website that emphasizes SEMCA's capacity to assist businesses with recruitment, retention and training of employees.	Develop and Distribute Business-Centered Communication Materials Produce a suite of marketing materials (brochures, case studies, videos) that demonstrate SEMCA's success in solving workforce challenges for businesses.	Develop and distribute 2-3 case studies that highlight how SEMCA's solutions directly addressed businesses' workforce challenges. Focus on measurable outcomes such as reduced turnover, improved recruitment efforts, and enhanced skills training. Video Testimonials from Business Partners Create videos that feature testimonials from regional businesses discussing the support SEMCA has provided.	Showcase Employer Success Stories: Highlight real business success stories through case studies, videos, and social media, demonstrating SEMCA's impact on business growth. Launch Business Support Hub: Create a digital hub on the website with resources for businesses, such as talent acquisition, training programs, and grant opportunities. Engage Employers with Personalized Outreach: Conduct personalized outreach and consultations with local businesses to understand their needs and offer relevant solutions. Incorporate SEMCA's **role as an advocate for regional businesses** in the messaging for the 30th anniversary celebration.
Activity: Position SEMCA as a facilitator of business services		Host Employer-Centric Workshops: Plan and host a series of events that emphasize SEMCA's **business services** that can help businesses thrive.	Employer Roundtable Event to Discuss Workforce Solutions	Promote the Launch of the Partner Resource Hub Launch the Partner Resource Hub on SEMCA's website	Position SEMCA as a Business Advocate: Advocate for business needs by staying involved in industry trends and participating in local business events and policy discussions.

					Offer Tailored Training Programs: Provide customized workforce development programs that help businesses upskill employees and build talent pipelines.
Create opportunities to regularly connect with policymakers	Aim: Position SEMCA as a Key Regional Workforce Partner	Aim: Build Relationships and Showcase SEMCA's Impact	Aim: Strengthen Advocacy and Increase SEMCA's Visibility	Aim: Reinforce SEMCA's Value and Solidify Long-term Relationships	
	Develop messaging tailored for policymakers, emphasizing SEMCA's impact and value. Participate in **Legislative Day.** Send the **Annual Report** to policymakers. Schedule legislator/staff visits to AJC	Organize meetings with policymakers. Share compelling success stories and impact data to reinforce SEMCA's leadership in workforce development.	Invite policymakers to tour/visit an AJC; **attend and participate** in events such as National Apprenticeship Week, Wayne County Manufacturing Day, and relevant workshops.	Build long-term relationships by updating policymakers regularly on SEMCA initiatives and regional workforce efforts. Send personalized invitations for the **30th Anniversary Celebration,** asking for their participation. Seek ongoing engagement and support from policymakers for SEMCA's future initiatives.	Policy Roundtables and Forums: Engage policymakers in discussions on workforce issues, creating a platform to shape future policies. Policy Briefings and Advocacy: Regularly distribute policy briefs to lawmakers, highlighting SEMCA's impact and advocating for continued support. Stakeholder Recognition Events: Host events to recognize policymakers, encouraging ongoing collaboration and dialogue. Feedback Surveys: Gather feedback from policymakers and stakeholders to refine SEMCA's programs and improve services.

					<u>Collaborative Workshops:</u> Partner with policymakers on workshops addressing workforce challenges and solutions.

Goal 2: Strengthen service delivery with industry and education partnerships	Q1 2025 (Jan–Mar)	Q2 2025 (Apr-June)	Q3 2025 (July–Sept)	Q4 2025 (Oct–Dec)	Future
Alignment of business services to industry **Business services restructuring for greater efficiency and impact**	Form Internal Committee Finalize Business Services RFP Discuss/set performance metrics for PY25 Business Services	Post Business Services RFP with outcome metrics based on new structure Select Business Service providers for new system Begin planning training for WIOA, PATH and other program staff on basics of BSP method Begin development of data tracking related to new Business Services metrics	Conduct orientation & training with new Business Services contractors Develop new business services contracts and related processes for new structure Develop new Business Services outreach material Invite Community College partners to quarterly Business Services partner meetings	Build out data tracking/capturing system for new Business Services metrics Troubleshoot issues identified in roll out of new business services system Partner Resource Hub Launch – Hub is placed on SEMCA's website with employer tools, resources and insights on workforce Work on Employer/Business survey and how to collect/track Host first BSP training session	Work with Business Services contractors and identifying industry/program specific BSRs & what the model looks like Develop connections with employers and training providers on new training programs for new careers Begin collecting ER feedback data on new business services team and methods Identify any areas of issue to be addressed Begin integrating new industries to career pathways based on feedback in Q4.

Strengthen talent across the region through increased collaboration with educational partners	Identify internal committee based on roles and skills needed Refine action plans	Benchmark CEAC functions against other education advisory groups Inventory Adult Education providers	Engage industry partners to participate in CEAC. Reach out to at least 3 potential prospects • Explore adding youth participants presence to CEAC Plan for an Adult Ed Convening	Engage industry partners to participate in CEAC • Explore adding youth participants presence to CEAC • Make recommendation of method to add youth participants to CEAC Execute an Adult Ed Convening • Host Launchpad training	Implement lessons learned from convening Integrate AE to Business Service meetings Begin identifying potential new industries to career pathways based on feedback from employers & community partners.
Improve customer services with an increased focus on SEMCA experience for all customers, through data, training and increased staff support		Identify internal committee based on roles and skills needed. Refine action plans	Review and revise Customer Service Surveys • Explore process improvement plan Plan for Business customer service customer satisfaction survey Inventory status of Case management to Coaching • Develop tiered plan to implement system wide that addresses new programs and legacy programs This may include selecting a pilot team for coaching expansion	Implement for Business customer service customer satisfaction survey Implement transition to fully support the coaching model for the pilot site • Train providers • Support meetings Feedback on process	Review implementation status for piloting coaching expansion beyond current use in PATH (and LINC?)

Goal 3: Optimize operations to increase efficiency and effectiveness	Q1 2025 (Jan–Mar)	Q2 2025 (Apr-June)	Q3 2025 (July–Sept)	Q4 2025 (Oct–Dec)	Future
Scenario planning to address potential changes	Identify internal scenario planning committee based on roles and skills needed	Defining parameters and defining baseline • What questions need to be answered? • Define likely scenarios (known and unknown) Work through key known scenario related to budget & develop work plan	Define tools necessary to determine staff skill baselines for key roles in organization Research tools needed to help retain staff Implement key plan elements for current budget scenario	Develop written plan to use as a guidepost Implement tools needed to help retain staff Begin work on scenario planning related to potential federal program changes.	Adjust plan and scenarios as necessary
Identify opportunities to streamline services and manage costs effectively	Begin research to replace accounting software to accommodate fundraising efforts and enhance reporting abilities	Select new accounting software vendor and develop implementation plan Identify internal services committee based on roles and skills needed	Implement new accounting software / execute plan	Begin using new software / refine configuration Begin review of Launchpad use – develop objectives Identify areas of improvement to Workforce Board Dashboard	Review and revamp participant eligibility process, including document collection Implement Launchpad objectives – continue to identify additional improvement Implement areas of improvement to Workforce Board Dashboard, continue to identify improvements
Diversify unrestricted funding while allocating resources strategically		Identify funding committee based on roles and skills needed • SEMCA Staff • External parties Board Members	Identify resources and organizations to help diversify funding Begin development of unrestricted fund policy / define goals	Research a fund development plan Complete development of unrestricted fund policy	Explore fee for service opportunities, ensure we are priced competitively Complete the fund development plan

					Engage organizations identified Continue to identify additional organizations

Appendix 5: Glossary

Industry: The particular sector in the economy that an employer or job seeker may be associated with. For example, in our region, manufacturing, construction, engineering, healthcare are all key industry sectors that employ many residents and have workforce needs that may be unique to their sector.

Employers: Regardless of sector or industry group, employers are anyone who hires individuals to work.

Customers: SEMCA serves 2 groups of customers—employers and job-seekers/individual workers. Eligibility for services varies by program, but most broadly we serve individuals who are eligible to work in the US who resides in our service area. Employers must have a physical presence in one of our communities for most employer services.

Contracted/Network Service Providers: SEMCA's network of sub-recipients who provide the majority of direct services to customers at our Michigan Works! American Job Centers. Service contracts are typically bid on a 3-year cycle.

Education: This includes K-12 system as well as Adult Education (GED/ESL/Citizenship) and post-secondary credit bearing institutions, such as community colleges and 4-year universities.