



Northern Lakes
**ECONOMIC
ALLIANCE**

ECONOMIC PULSE

Fall 2025

ABOUT NLEA

Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (NLEA) is the nonprofit economic development organization serving businesses and communities across the region of Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet counties.

Mission

Our mission is to drive economic resiliency in the NLEA region by ensuring the resources, infrastructure, and policies exist to fuel business growth and community prosperity.

Strategic Priorities

Business Growth

Support businesses by reducing barriers to growth and family-supporting job creation.

Infrastructure & Development

Invest in workforce housing, mixed-use projects, infrastructure expansion, and industrial sites to meet business and community needs.

Talent Retention & Attraction

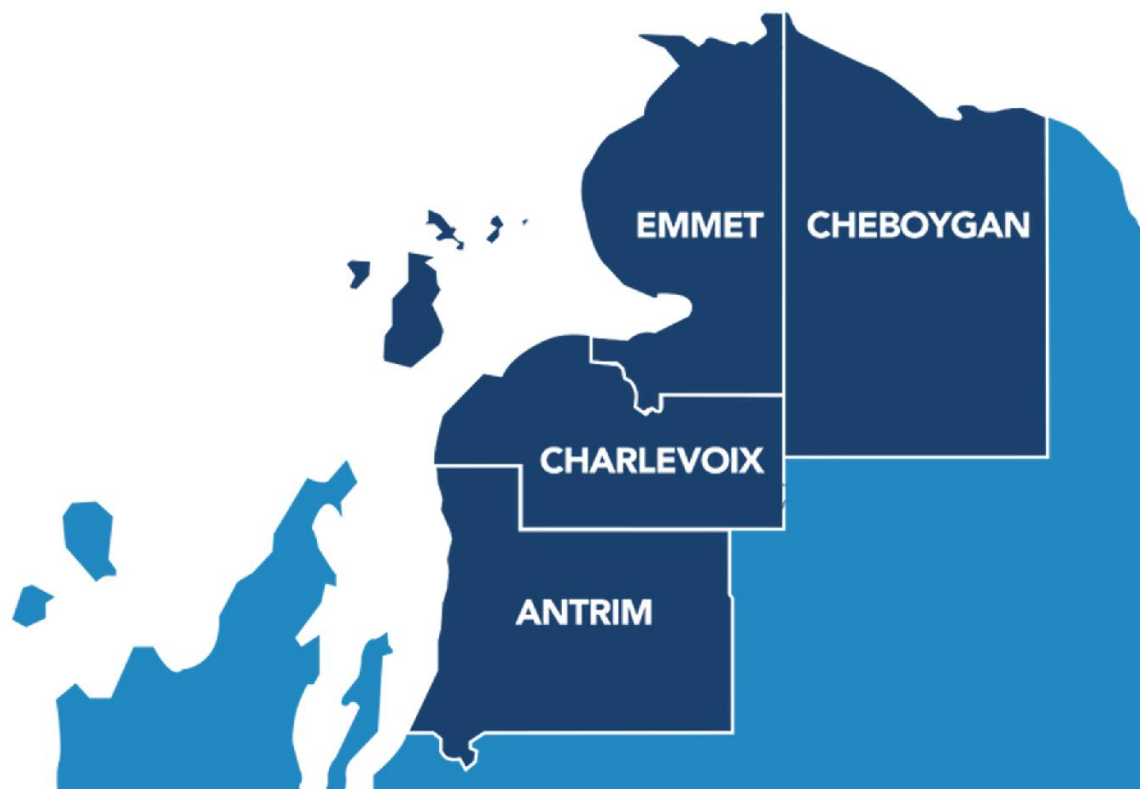
Elevate career opportunities and build talent pipelines to retain and attract families and a robust workforce.

Education & Policy

Equip local, state, and federal leaders with the tools to implement policies that support business and community investment in the region.

Why the Economic Pulse Report?

We believe data is essential for shaping effective strategies, policies, and investments that drive a stronger regional economy. This report provides a snapshot of the latest quarterly trends, including the top economic impact issues currently on the minds of local community and business leaders.



PROJECTS UNDERWAY

The region continues to attract new investment, from existing local businesses and new ones. These are just some of the projects currently underway in the region.



Little Roots Childcare

Little Roots Childcare in Petoskey, a nonprofit created by the Manthei Family of businesses, will add 40 much-needed slots to the regional childcare ecosystem when it opens in Winter 2026. Michigan State University's Child Care Mapping Project found that the ratio of children to licensed childcare slots in Emmet County is 4.1, meeting the definition of a childcare desert. The project includes the renovation of a vacant church and creation of eight new jobs with higher-than-average pay and health benefits. With assistance from the NLEA and Great Lakes Energy, the project will be supported by a zero percent interest loan through the USDA loan program administered by Great Lakes Energy.



LM Marine

LM Marine purchased an industrial site in Charlevoix and is developing a new service and repair facility. The project will provide LM Marine with the space needed to meet the needs of the region's growing recreational boating industry, augmenting its showroom at Bay Harbor. The project is anticipated to generate more than \$7.5 million in capital investment and create 20 new jobs with wages greater than the regional median. Technical assistance support from the NLEA, as well as support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Charlevoix Township through performance-based grants and an Industrial Facilities Exemption Certificate are supporting the costs of renovation at this industrial site.

Regional Reach, Regional Impact

The LM Marine project is the latest project in a series of important regional economic developments. In 2022, Daifuku Airport North America, a national leader in airport material handling systems, consolidated multiple sites to Boyne City creating industrial property vacancies in Emmet County. Earlier this year, Aster Brands, a manufacturer of steel forming systems and provider of engineering, marketing, sales support, and new product development for the concrete manufacturing industry, then moved from Charlevoix Township to one of Daifuku's former sites in Harbor Springs. Now LM Marine is moving into Aster Brands' former site as an expansion of their existing business.

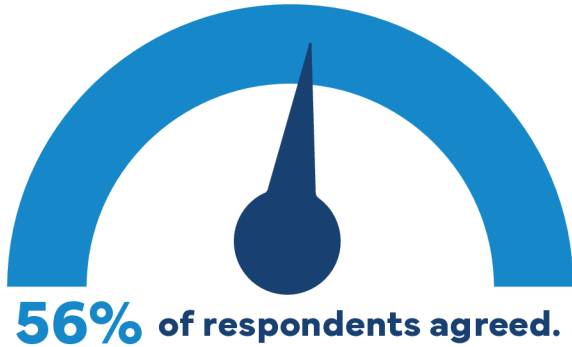
These moves within the region reflect the importance of regional economic development to support existing businesses as they grow and require more space. Local and regional support is critical, and the NLEA is proud to assist these companies as they create family-supporting, year-round career opportunities for our communities.



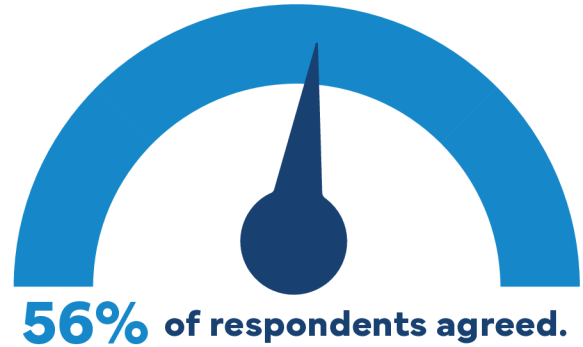
BUSINESS OUTLOOK

NLEA surveyed business leaders with operations across the region to understand their perception of the local business climate, barriers to success, and economic outlook. Responding businesses represent over 3,450 employees in the region and a variety of industries.

Our Region is a Good Place to Grow Your Business



Our Region is Improving as a Place to Grow Your Business



Only 56% of business leaders in the region agreed that it is currently a good place to grow or is improving as a place to grow your business. A significant portion of respondents were also neutral on the two statements—31% for the first and 38% for the second—indicating many business leaders have a tepid perception of the regional business climate.

What are the Largest Barriers to Growing Your Business?

When asked to identify their top three barriers to success, business leaders overwhelmingly cited Attainable Housing and Staffing as their greatest challenges—reflecting the ongoing struggle with talent attraction and retention. To help address these issues, the NLEA is advancing multiple initiatives, including securing a MSHDA Employer Assisted Housing Fund award for local employers, supporting workforce housing development, launching a new marketing effort to support recruitment, and organizing employer discussions to share best practices.

Looking ahead, 69% of respondents held a positive industry outlook and 91% reported stable or rising sales. Additionally, 44% of respondents plan to physically expand within the region in the next four years, mostly in the Manufacturing sector.

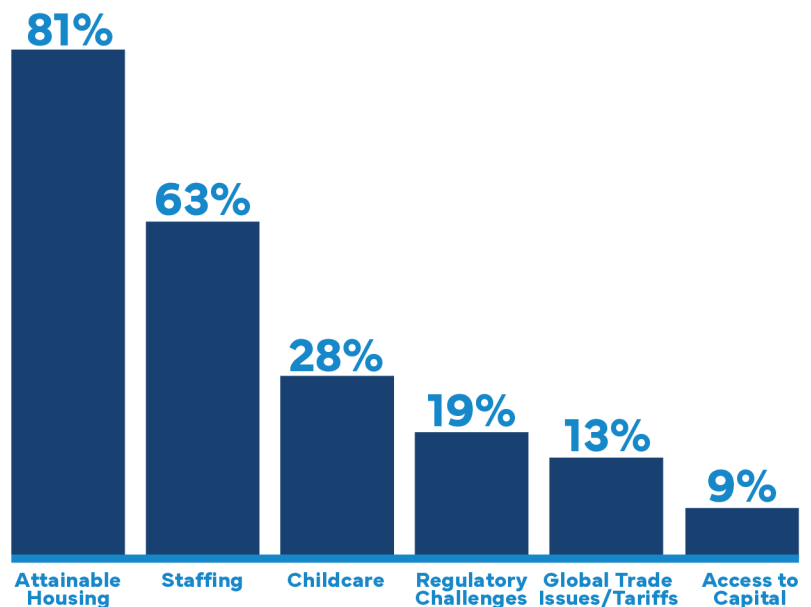
Businesses with Staffing Shortages Estimated:

330 jobs

They could hire 330 workers in the next two years with a more robust talent pool.

\$185M

They could generate an additional \$185 million in revenue in the next two years if staffed to capacity.

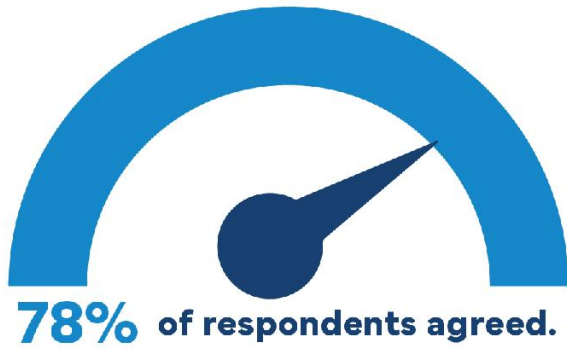


Note: Survey respondents could select up to three barriers from a list of ten. The graph displays the top six responses.

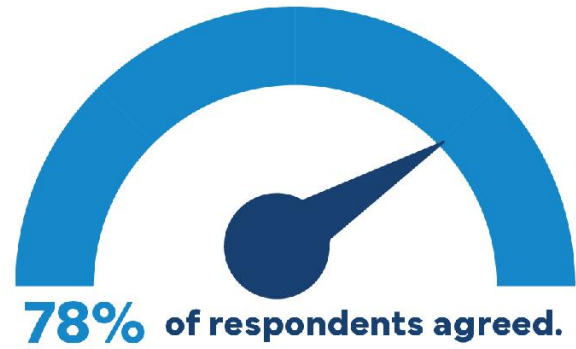
LOCAL GOVERNMENT OUTLOOK

NLEA surveyed elected and appointed leaders from local units of government across the region to understand their views of the local business climate, what they consider barriers to success, and desired forms of development.

Your Community is a Good Place to Grow a Business



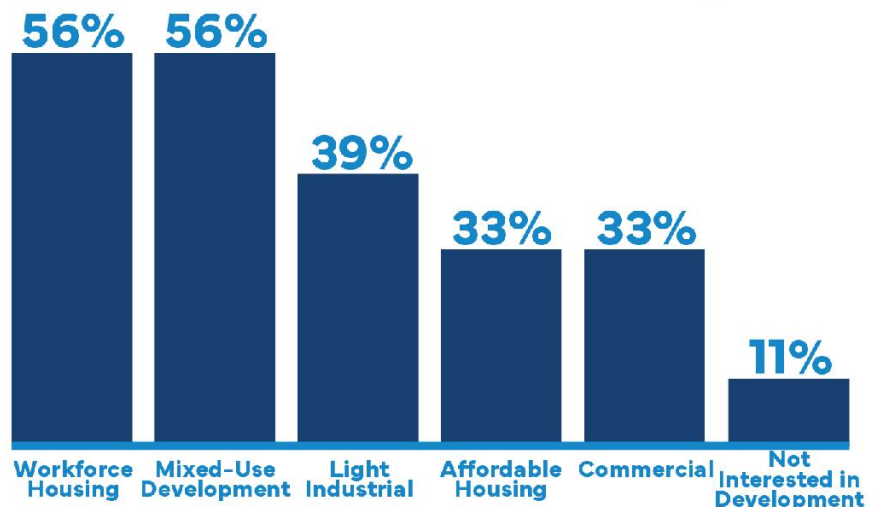
Your Community is Improving as a Place to Grow a Business



The survey revealed local government leaders had a far more optimistic view on the local business climate than business leaders. However, when asked to identify barriers to business growth, government leaders shared similar responses; they identified staffing and attainable housing as top barriers.

Desired Types of Development in Your Community?

The development type most local leaders would like to see remains Workforce Housing (80% to 120% of Area Median Income) consistent with the Spring 2025 Report. The desire for additional housing development aligns with extremely low residential vacancy rates in the region. Local leaders also expressed the same level of interest in Mixed-Use Development, followed by Light Industrial as the most preferred development types.



LOCAL ECONOMIC DATA

Employment Data

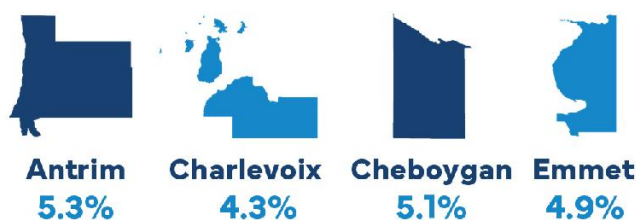


Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics: Local Area Unemployment Statistics' preliminary August data

Labor Force Growth

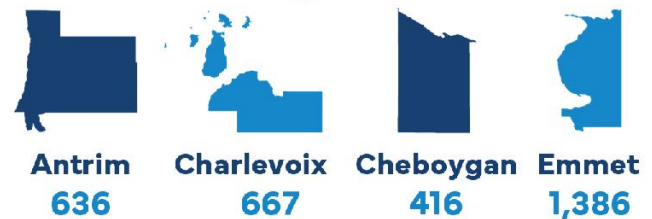
The region's workforce has recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic low. Bureau of Labor Statistics data reveals the 2024 average annual labor force was 1,309 or 2.4% higher than in 2019. This labor force increase is driven by local population growth, including prime economic age individuals ages 25 to 54, and a slight increase in the region's labor force participation rate from 2019.

Unemployment Rate



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics: Local Area Unemployment Statistics' preliminary August data

Building Permits



Total Construction Permits Issued Jan 1 to Sep 30

Source: County Building Departments
*Data includes new construction, additions, alterations, and demolitions.

Manufacturing Snapshot

\$369.7M

Manufacturing contributes \$369.7 million in total wages, accounting for 22.7% of all regional wages, the highest share of any sector.¹

5,140 jobs

Manufacturing provides the region's third-largest share of private employment (16.5%), following Accommodation & Food Services and Retail Trade.²

\$847.6M

Manufacturing contributes \$847.6 million to the region's Gross Regional Product, a local measure equivalent to Gross Domestic Product.³

1. US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, September 9). Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages [Data set]. <https://www.bls.gov/cew/>.

2. US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.

3. Lightcast. (2025, September). Economy Overview: Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet counties. Retrieved from Lightcast.

WORKFORCE HOUSING PROJECTS



81% of business leaders reported Attainable Housing as one of their top three barriers to growth. This experience is reflected in regional housing assessments which show that 2,322 for-rent units and 6,477 for-sale units are needed in the next few years to meet demand in NLEA's region. 89% of government leaders identified Attainable Housing as desired development. Multiple projects are underway and will provide hundreds of new units this Fall for the region's workforce.

Pine Pond **Ongoing Development | Petoskey**

Using a manufactured for-sale home and land-lease model, Pine Pond is phasing in over 100 new housing units across several years. Available homes are priced on average between \$200,000-300,000 with starter homes as low as \$173,000.

Victory Square **Fall 2025 | Petoskey**

This workforce housing development will feature 50 units for rent including studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments.

The Block at Petoskey **Fall 2025 | Petoskey**

This 204-unit housing development has designated units for households earning 100-120% of area median income. The Block was one of the first in the state to utilize Housing Tax Increment Financing (TIF), along with Brownfield TIF to support development.

Bellaire Lofts **Fall 2025 | Bellaire**

Bellaire Lofts is a 50-unit development that will feature flexible suite designs to house more than 130 residents. The project was one of the first in the state to leverage Housing TIF to support development.

Habitat for Humanity **Ongoing Development | regional**

The Meadowlands development in Alanson includes 38 mixed-income homes built over the last few years. The final home was delivered to the site in October. The organization currently has a total of 10 homes under construction between Emmet and Cheboygan counties.

Lofts at Lumber Square **Fall 2025 | Petoskey**

All 60 units in this development are for households making 80-120% of area median income. The project will have one-, two-, and three-bedroom units.



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