

2025

Impact Report

Driving Economic
Growth in Northern
Michigan



Northern Lakes
**ECONOMIC
ALLIANCE**



Mission

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

Vision

The NLEA region will be a thriving and resilient economy with a robust business environment that provides a diversity of family-sustaining career opportunities; an abundance of natural beauty; and an exceptional quality of life that allows all residents and future generations to prosper.

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 evolving 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.

A Message from Leadership

Northern Michigan's economy is evolving, and the first year of NLEA's strategic plan focused on turning intention into action around the region's most pressing challenges and strategic opportunities.

NLEA has supported business expansion while advancing practical workforce solutions, including employer-assisted housing, workforce housing development, childcare capacity, talent attraction efforts, and data-driven labor force analysis. At the same time, we advanced investment-ready sites to ensure business growth opportunities are not delayed when talent and capital align.



The progress made this year demonstrates what is possible with strengthened capacity and strategic execution. Expanded partnerships with the private sector will continue to accelerate these results and exponentially grow impact in the years ahead - ensuring a more robust regional economy long into the future.

Payton Heins
President/CEO

The first year of NLEA's strategic plan marked a powerful step forward for both the organization and the region.

NLEA advanced development-ready sites, supported transformational projects, elevated workforce and housing solutions, and strengthened its role as a trusted regional leader in data, education, and policy. Just as importantly, the organization built momentum—aligning partners, accelerating solutions, and positioning Northern Michigan to compete and grow.



The board is energized by the direction of the organization and confident in its ability to lead into the future. With a strong foundation in place and growing collaboration across sectors, NLEA is well positioned to expand its impact and continue shaping a resilient regional economy.

Dave Cluley
2025 Board Chair



Impact at a Glance

\$79.84M

in private investment from completed projects*

\$10.4M

in state and federal funds secured for local projects in 2025

512

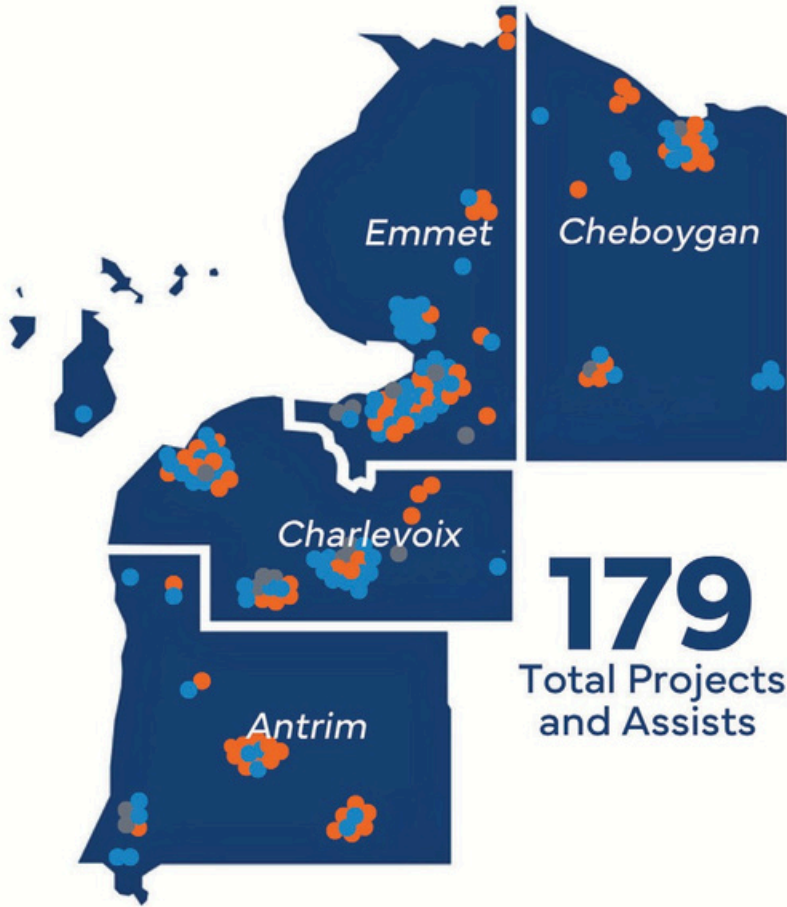
new and retained family-supporting jobs*

\$170.9M

private investment in project pipeline

*2023-2025 totals to reflect common multi-year project timelines

2025 Support Delivered



85

**Business
Assists**

Includes two
region-wide assists

76

**Community
Assists**

Includes eight
region-wide assists

18

**Training
and Events**

Includes one virtual
event



Business Growth

The NLEA drives year-round economic growth by supporting business retention, expansion, and attraction across the region. As a trusted partner, the organization bridges the public and private sectors, helping companies navigate site selection, incentives, financing, and technical assistance. Through financial assistance, education, and strategic connections, NLEA is helping the region's economic drivers create career opportunities and foster more rapid innovation.

Catalyzing Business Expansion: LM Marine

LM Marine's expansion in Charlevoix Township will generate more than \$7.5 million in capital investment and 20 new jobs with wages above the regional median. NLEA supported the project by helping assemble performance-based grants and industrial development incentives, in partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Charlevoix Township. This investment in the renovation of an existing industrial facility will allow LM Marine to meet growing demand in Northern Michigan's boating industry.

Positioning Northern Michigan for Defense and Aerospace Growth

In 2025, NLEA joined state and industry leaders at Michigan's inaugural Defense and Aerospace Summit, elevating Northern Michigan as a competitive location for advanced manufacturing and supply-chain expansion. With insights from existing regional manufacturers in defense and aerospace NLEA informed statewide conversations about readiness, capacity, and future growth opportunities in Northern Michigan.



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NLEA has been a great partner providing our business benchmarking & learning opportunities with other area manufacturers. The networking NLEA brings to the table facilitates sharing of best practices in all areas of business. Strengthening not only our business but overall Northern Michigan business development.

Jim Dunn
General Manager,
Anchor Lamina

Strengthening Small Business and Entrepreneurial Growth

Through NLEA's expanded business development efforts, and as a strategic partner in the Northwest Michigan Small Business Support Hub, NLEA connected small businesses and entrepreneurs with capital and technical support. In addition to business trainings and workshops, NLEA delivered direct consulting assistance to more than eighty businesses and entrepreneurs, helping them secure capital for strategic opportunities and support their continued success and innovation in the region.

85
business
assists

\$2.5M
in direct cost
savings
to local
businesses





Talent Retention & Attraction

Workforce shortages continue to be one of the most significant barriers to business growth in the region. NLEA addresses this challenge by aligning housing, employer-led solutions, and regional talent retention and attraction marketing to grow and activate the regional labor force.

Expanding Access to Workforce Homeownership

NLEA secured a \$490,000 matching grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to support the launch of Manthei Wood Products' Down Payment Assistance Program. The initiative helps employees purchase homes locally, strengthening employee retention and attraction while expanding access to housing in a constrained market.

Advancing Employer-Led Talent Solutions

Through the *Catalyst Conversations: Staffing Up* event, NLEA convened regional employers to share innovative approaches to talent attraction and retention. Key insights were documented in the [Regional Talent Solutions Report](#), highlighting opportunities to scale effective strategies across industries and communities.

To address outdated perceptions about career availability, NLEA partnered with regional manufacturers to launch a marketing initiative showcasing diverse, family-supporting careers available in Northern Michigan. The campaign, being introduced in 2026, will feature employees across a range of roles sharing why they choose to build their careers in the region.



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NLEA supported us on several projects, securing grants and 0% interest loans for a building purchase, a building renovation, down payment assistance for employees to purchase homes, and transportation for employees getting to work. This has been hugely beneficial for our companies and employees and we are so thankful for all that NLEA does for our region!

Abe Manthei

Director of Missional Development,
Manthei Group

Expanding Childcare to Support the Workforce

With support from NLEA and Great Lakes Energy (GLE), Little Roots Childcare in Petoskey will add 48 licensed childcare slots when it opens in Spring 2026. Located in a designated 'childcare desert,' the project includes the renovation of a vacant church and the creation of eleven new jobs with competitive wages and benefits. Financing through a zero-interest USDA loan administered by GLE with technical assistance provided by the NLEA is supporting critical renovations to the building.

48

new
childcare
slots

14

working families
now able to
purchase homes
locally





Infrastructure & Development

Economic resiliency depends on development-ready land, modern infrastructure, and housing that meets the needs of the workforce. NLEA serves as a connector and technical assistance provider among developers, municipalities, utilities, and funding partners to advance projects that position the region for a stronger future.

Advancing Strategic Development in East Jordan

In 2025, NLEA hosted *Development Spotlight: East Jordan* in partnership with the City of East Jordan and the East Jordan Chamber of Commerce. The event convened developers, community leaders, and industry professionals to explore the community's housing, mixed-use, and industrial development priorities. It featured development-ready sites, funding tools, and demographic trends, and included guided tours of residential, commercial, and industrial opportunities. The program reinforced East Jordan's momentum toward long-term, sustainable growth.

NLEA also helped position Air Industrial Park for continued business growth and investment with the adoption of expanded development incentives and a Strategic Site Readiness grant for predevelopment work, and furthered the City's downtown transformation by securing brownfield development resources for mixed-use redevelopment.

Preparing Investment-Ready Sites for Future Growth

In the first year of our strategic plan, NLEA advanced 270 acres across the region toward investment readiness. This work included identifying infrastructure gaps, supporting the adoption of local development incentives, pursuing infrastructure funding, and conducting early-stage predevelopment analysis to reduce risk and accelerate future investment.



The City of East Jordan appreciates the strong partnership with Northern Lakes Economic Alliance. Their support with strategic site readiness and hosting a developer day event has helped position our community for future investment and sustainable growth. These efforts are critical as we work to create new opportunities and strengthen East Jordan's economic foundation.

Tom Cannon
East Jordan City Administrator

Accelerating Workforce Housing Development Across the Region

NLEA supports workforce housing projects region-wide from mixed-use redevelopment to large-scale multifamily construction. By helping partners fill financing gaps and navigate local hurdles, the organization continued playing a critical role in expanding housing supply and supporting workforce stability. In 2025 we saw earlier projects make significant construction progress and connected developers with new site opportunities and assistance filling financing gaps, cultivating a more robust workforce housing pipeline.

270

acres identified and advanced for future business growth

820

new workforce housing units in the pipeline





Education & Policy

Through data analysis, education, and policy engagement, NLEA serves as a leading regional voice on economic diversification, workforce sustainability, traded industry growth, and transformational development.

Convening Leaders Around Critical Economic Challenges

Catalyst Conversations is a new event series designed to bring together regional business and community leaders to engage with experts on timely economic development topics. The series culminated in the *Regional Business Outlook*, informed by results from the Fall Economic Pulse Survey and first-hand industry insights from leadership of Aster Brands, King Orchards, Landscape Logic, Ironwood Construction, and Huntington National Bank.

Shaping the Region's Economic Outlook

The annual *Economic Symposium* returned to Boyne Mountain Resort in 2025 with the theme Future Forward. The event explored how Northern Michigan can prepare for what's next, featuring panels and breakout sessions on demographics, development, technology, and business succession planning. The program also recognized outstanding leadership and contributions: emergency responders from Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet counties received the Guts and Grit Award; the Manthei Group was honored with the Project of the Year Award; and North Central Michigan College earned the Regional Champion Award.

Delivering Timely Data to Inform Decision-Making

NLEA's biannual Economic Pulse Reports, provide timely snapshots of labor force trends, employment data, industry performance, and business sentiment. The reports, launched in 2025, respond directly to stakeholder demand for current, actionable economic data to inform decision-making.



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It was meaningful to have business leaders sharing ideas and information that can help to build better organizations that are the backbone of our community.

Bill Marshall

Commercial Relationships Manager,
Huntington National Bank

Advancing Regional Priorities Through Policy Leadership

In 2025, NLEA joined Economic Development Leaders for Michigan and continued its partnership with the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance. Through policy engagement, NLEA helped elevate regional priorities, protect critical economic development resources, and advance conversations around policies and incentives that support investment and competitiveness across Northern Michigan.

1,668
stakeholders
engaged
across the
region

4
new
investment-
friendly policies
implemented





The People Who Power Our Work

NLEA Team



Payton Heins
President/CEO



Dave Kronberg
Director of Business Growth



Jessica Lovay
Senior Program Manager



Rachel Pott
Engagement Coordinator



Sam Bailey
Strategic Initiatives Manager

2025 Board of Directors

Dave Cluley, 2025 Chair
Emmet County Resident

David Ronald Finley, Ph.D.
North Central Michigan College

Joanne Schroeder
Munson Health Care – Charlevoix

Taylor Sides, Vice Chair
Great Lakes Energy

Chris Hackbarth
DTE Energy

Jeremy Scott
Antrim County Administrator

Jeff Lawson, Secretary
Cheboygan County Administrator

Mark Heydlauff
Charlevoix City Manager

Kevin Shepard
Charlevoix County Administrator

Carlin Smith, Treasurer
Consumers Energy

Robert Jess
Charlevoix County Commissioner

Greg Shooks
Shooks Farm Co. and Cellar 1914

Neil Ahrens
Ahrens Gallery and Studio

Matthew Keene
Citizens National Bank

Nathan Swailes
Ellsworth Farmers Exchange

Dawn Bodnar
Awakon Federal Credit Union

Adam Koivisto
Michigan State University Extension

Terry VanAlstine
Antrim County Commissioner

David Boyer
Emmet County Administrator

Sharen Lange
Cheboygan County Economic Development Corporation

Dave White
Emmet County Commissioner

Tom Davidson
Anchor Lamina

Bill Marhsall
Huntington National Bank

Jeremy Whitley
World Investment Fund

Tom Eustice
Cheboygan County Commissioner

Jim Rummer
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District



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Growth isn't given. It's built — one investment, one company, one job at a time. And when that happens, it does more than lift balance sheets; it changes lives. It shapes the trajectory of families for generations. That's why the NLEA matters. Every dollar invested, every entrepreneur supported, every company grown becomes a lasting force for good in Northern Michigan.

Jake Manthei
President,
Aster Brands

2025 Investors & Partners

Antrim County	Cheboygan County Community Foundation	Manthei Capital
Charlevoix County	Citizens National Bank	Manthei Construction
Cheboygan County	City of Boyne City	Manthei Group
Emmet County	City of Charlevoix	Manthei Wood Products
Charlevoix-Emmet ISD	City of East Jordan	Networks Northwest
Michigan State University Extension	City of Petoskey	NEMCOG
North Central Michigan College	Consumers Energy	Peninsula Fiber Network
20Fathoms	DTE Foundation	Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation
4Front Credit Union	EJ, Inc.	Resort Township
Aster Brands	Enbridge	Straits Area Federal Credit Union
Awakon Federal Credit Union	Great Lakes Energy	Village of Central Lake
Baker College	Huntington National Bank	Village of Elk Rapids
Banks Township	ITC Holdings Corporation	Village of Mackinaw City
Beaver Island Boat Company	Link Industries	Village of Pellston
Charlevoix State Bank		



Northern Lakes **ECONOMIC ALLIANCE**



1313 Boyne Ave, Boyne City, MI 49712
231-582-6482 | info@thenlea.com | thenlea.com