2027 Call for Co-Learning Plan Authors

Background

Since 2011, the Regional Economic Innovation (REI) initiative at MSU's Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) has supported over 200 innovative economic development projects in Michigan, spurring high-growth entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic innovation. Of these projects, 75 have been Co-Learning Plans. Co-Learning, or collaborative learning, is an approach that brings together the expertise and experience of multiple stakeholders to build common understanding, solve shared problems, and create actionable knowledge. A Co-Learning Plan at REI is a research-based project conducted by an expert in the field that produces actionable recommendations, tools, or models that address emerging challenges and opportunities across Michigan.

Call for Authors

REI is **calling for authors** and experts to research and develop Co-Learning Plans (CLPs) on economic development tools, models, policies, programs and practices based on several areas of interest identified by the REI Network. Findings and recommendations in these Co-Learning Plans will serve as a resource for local and state economic development practitioners and policymakers as they consider important decisions that affect development efforts in communities and regions across Michigan.

Innovative Economic Development Topics

In close collaboration with its Consultative Panel of experts across the state, REI has identified as possible Co-Learning Plans for 2027 the following topical areas:

1. Building Regional Capacity for Energy-Secure Economic Development

Regional energy independence is not just a question of how much energy a region can produce. It is also a question of whether local and regional institutions have the authority, knowledge, workforce, and processes needed to make energy systems work for them. This Co-Learning Plan would examine one or more of the following dimensions: (1) permitting and deployment timelines – regarding energy projects, what approaches could make timeliness more predictable for communities, developers, and prospective employers? (2) local energy governance – which operational arrangements are realistically available under the state's regulatory framework for communities to influence energy decisions, and how do the costs/ benefits of these alternatives compare with existing arrangements? (3) energy workforce – what skills and knowledge are lacking in local governments and EDOs, and would a regional utility training program improve the quality of planning, procurement, infrastructure decisions,

or business recruitment? (4) energy systems literacy and decision-making - what do local officials need to know about generation, transmission, distribution, interconnection, and electricity markets to make sound development decisions? Projects should move beyond describing energy challenges to help regional stakeholders make better decisions, coordinate investments, or implement solutions that support long-term economic resilience and community prosperity.

2. Building Public Trust in Economic Development: A Community-Centered Approach

Economic development organizations (EDOs) play an important role in shaping regional prosperity. Yet the function of EDOs is not always well understood by the communities they serve. Residents may have questions about the use of public resources, the benefits of business incentives, the kinds of jobs being created, or whether economic development strategies reflect their priorities. Economic developers, in turn, may struggle to communicate their contributions, explain the rationale for particular tools, or build durable support for regional strategies. This Co-Learning Plan would explore how economic developers can build the relationships, practices, and shared understanding needed to shape economic development strategies with their communities—and then communicate the value of those strategies in ways that are transparent, credible, and responsive to public priorities.

3. Generational Wealth and Community Prosperity

Communities across the United States are experiencing a significant demographic and economic transition as older generations approach retirement and assets change ownership. These transitions may involve privately held businesses, residential and commercial real estate, farms, financial wealth, philanthropic resources, and community leadership. The central question is this: How can economic developers and community partners help their regions navigate generational transitions in ownership, property, capital, and leadership in ways that expand opportunity, sustain productive assets, and strengthen long-term community prosperity?

This Co-Learning Plan would examine one or more of the following dimensions: (1) business succession and ownership transitions - how can communities support the continuity of viable businesses as ownership changes, and create opportunities for new entrepreneurs to acquire established enterprises? (2) property transitions and community development - how can communities anticipate and respond to changes in residential, commercial, agricultural, and other property ownership? (3) intergenerational capital - how can communities strengthen connections between transitioning wealth, local investment opportunities, and regional economic priorities? (4) community capital and local wealth-building - how can Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs), community foundations, philanthropic partnerships, loan funds, guarantee pools,

and other capital mechanisms be leveraged to facilitate the generation and recirculation of capital in communities?

4. Supporting Michigan Manufacturing in the AI Economy

The growth of AI in Michigan is creating demand for physical infrastructure. This technological transition presents an opportunity to connect a major infrastructure investment cycle with the state's established manufacturing capabilities. Firms serving automotive, electrical equipment, machinery, thermal management, materials, and precision manufacturing markets may possess capabilities that could translate into new products, customers, and supply-chain relationships. However, the presence of relevant manufacturing capabilities does not guarantee that Michigan firms can enter these markets. Suppliers may face barriers involving product specifications, certification, capital investment, production capacity, customer qualification, workforce skills, and access to established procurement networks. At the same time, data-center investment within Michigan does not necessarily translate into manufacturing growth within the state if high-value equipment is sourced elsewhere.

This Co-Learning Plan would identify where Michigan manufacturers can compete effectively in the supply chains supporting AI infrastructure and what practical steps would help them capture a greater share of the associated economic opportunity.

5. Autonomous Systems Supply Chain

Autonomous systems—such as uncrewed aircraft, drones, and related platforms, components, software, and services—are creating new opportunities to address public-sector and commercial needs in areas such as agriculture, environmental monitoring, transportation, infrastructure inspection, and public safety. Michigan's established strengths in advanced manufacturing, automotive engineering, materials, electronics, and related industries may provide a foundation for participation in emerging autonomous-systems supply chains. However, testing and deploying autonomous technologies does not necessarily translate into local production, supplier development, or sustained economic benefit. Important components and services may be sourced elsewhere, while Michigan firms with relevant capabilities may lack the market intelligence, customer relationships, specialized equipment, or technical qualifications needed to enter these supply chains.

This Co-Learning Plan would determine where regions can compete effectively, which supply-chain gaps represent meaningful economic opportunities, and what actions would help Michigan businesses capture a greater share of the value created by autonomous systems.

6. Rural Health Capacity as Economic Infrastructure

Access to healthcare is an essential component of community and economic development. Healthcare services support workforce participation, employer recruitment and retention, household stability, and the ability of communities to attract and retain residents. Healthcare

institutions also provide employment, purchase goods and services, and contribute to the economic and civic life of the regions they serve. Yet many rural communities face growing challenges in sustaining healthcare services. Financial pressures, workforce shortages, changing patterns of care, and geographic isolation can make traditional hospital-based delivery models difficult to maintain. When services are reduced or facilities close, communities must contend not only with changes in access to care but also with potential effects on employment, emergency response, business confidence, and long-term regional development. The June 2026 closure of Sturgis Hospital in Michigan illustrates these interconnected challenges. At the same time, new approaches to rural healthcare delivery and a significant federal investment in rural health transformation create opportunities to reconsider how regional health capacity can be sustained. The federal Rural Health Transformation Program provides $50 billion nationally over fiscal years 2026–2030. Michigan received approximately $173.1 million for its first budget period, creating a timely context for regional planning and implementation.

This Co-Learning Plan would examine how communities can maintain access to essential health services and the economic and social functions those services support, potentially through different combinations of facilities, providers, technologies, and regional partnerships—even when traditional hospital-based delivery models are difficult to maintain.

7. NDAs in Publicly Funded Economic Development Projects

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and its Open Meetings Act both emphasize the need for the inner workings of government to be available to the public, yet each also recognizes that there are legitimate circumstances for confidentiality. Within this legal framework, there are recent instances in Michigan where public officials have signed non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) with data-center developers or prospective operators, which raises a significant tension.

This Co-Learning Plan would explore one or more of the following questions: How does the use of these confidentiality agreements affect the ability of public officials to fulfill their responsibilities to constituents during economic-development negotiations? Do confidentiality agreements distinguish between information that genuinely needs protection and information that is merely politically sensitive? What has been learned after companies have terminated NDAs with Michigan townships following the agreement becoming public and controversy ensuing? Does secrecy help or hinder economic development projects? Understanding these factors could aid Michigan municipalities in approaching the usage of confidentiality agreements.

8. Other

REI welcomes additional Co-Learning Plans that explore innovative economic development strategies, tools, models, policies, and programs to address economic ecosystem gaps in Michigan.

Prior Co-Learning Plans

You can view the Co-Learning Plans from 2026 on our website at reicenter.org/projects.

Application Instructions

Each proposal package must include the following items:

Author(s)/Investigator(s) Information

Please provide a summary for each investigator or team of investigators, emphasizing the capacities and prior experiences relevant to effective engagement with the primary intended audience of local and state economic developers (**one page**). *Experience in writing publishable quality papers and the ability to present these materials to a diverse audience is also required.*

Narrative

Provide a detailed narrative (**not to exceed three pages**) that describes the proposed scope of work. The narrative should be double-spaced, have three-quarter-inch margins, and 12-point font. Please **include a 100-150-word abstract** at the beginning of the proposal. If awarded, this abstract will serve as a description of your CLP project.

The proposal should be well organized, and include the following sections clearly identified:

1. Describe the population on which your proposed Co-Learning Plan is focused (ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed);
2. Identify Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRCs) and/or concentration of opportunity zone tracts involved in your project;
3. Select one of the 2027 topical areas for innovative economic development, discussing both the topic's significance and implications for Michigan communities and regions;
4. Create a detailed plan of work for conducting the analysis (e.g., scope, scale, and sequence of the proposed investigation, sources and methods of gathering information, analytic approaches and techniques to be employed, etc.);
5. Identify any special needs that must be accommodated for successful completion of proposed analysis (e.g., access to specific individuals or information), and discussion of proposed methods to accommodate such needs (if any);

6. Describe the anticipated benefit of any intended deliverable outcomes of the project, beyond those required by this request (if any);
7. Develop a dissemination plan, which describes how the project will be publicized and shared with the community, including Who/What/Where/How (social media, video, press release, presentation, etc.) and When (timeline with benchmarks);
8. Describe briefly how you will make your final report ADA compliant/accessible.
9. Describe and justify your requested budget;

Budget

The narrative proposal must include a brief summary of the budget. The budget should include personnel, travel, supplies, 'other' and a total (we do not allocate funds for food); including costs associated with presentation at the 2027 annual Innovate Michigan! Summit. **Total costs should not exceed $5,000.**

Writing Samples

Two writing samples of 3-5 pages must be submitted to be considered. These samples should demonstrate your writing ability and can be hyperlinked to materials on a website or electronic versions.

Deadline & Submission Process

Applications must be received by **5:00 pm EST Friday, December 11, 2026.** The 2-page application, which can be found at the end of this document **must be emailed** to rei@msu.edu In the subject line, please enter your Co-Learning Plan title, the date, and your last name. Submissions will be acknowledged by an email message to the lead author named on the application.

Selection Criteria

Selection of proposals will be based on how well the proposed work plan meets the following criteria and to what degree the author(s) is qualified.

1. A clear focus and understanding of the topic, experience, and knowledge in the topic.
2. Demonstrated capability to meet the standards of due diligence in conducting the scope of work.
3. Demonstrated capacity to communicate effectively to economic development practitioners, policymakers, and others.
4. The CLP is a new idea or strategy for local and state economic development solutions in Michigan.
5. The CLP emphasizes actionable knowledge on the practical implications of empirical research on economic development topic(s).
6. A Dissemination Plan that demonstrates the capacity to effectively share information.
7. The author(s) has the capacity to meet project deadlines.

8. Project budget is appropriate for the scope of work proposed and competitive with other applications received.

Preference will be given to initiatives and projects that include commitments for cost-sharing of funding (e.g., cash, credit, financing commitment); leveraging of in-kind assets, especially from for-profit business enterprises; building on and/or extending related government or non-profit initiatives; engaging Economic Development District stakeholders and partners; and benefiting distressed economies.

The final selection of a Co-Learning Plan author(s) is subject to REI in accordance with overall project objectives.

Eligibility

Economic development practitioners, entrepreneurs, community leaders, educators, policymakers, university faculty, staff, and students affiliated with any postsecondary education institutions in Michigan are invited to submit proposals under this request.

Funding

The Co-Learning Plan application process is competitive. REI expects to fund 2-3 Co-Learning Plans for 2027. Plans selected for funding will receive financial support **up to $5,000** for the scope of work. If your application is selected, REI will contact you to finalize the scope of work and financial arrangement. Be prepared to keep and submit all receipts of costs associated with the creation of your Co-Learning Plan in case of an audit.

Use of AI

The growing prevalence and use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in the production of community and economic development products calls upon us to provide reasonable guidance to our partners and colleagues on how that usage may be ethically employed. These guidelines are an initial set of recommendations that recognize that AI is a fast-evolving technology that may have value in addressing capacity issues for communities in writing and data analysis.

We offer these guidelines as a beginning point in this evolving field, and, as the practice of AI in community and economic development matures, we welcome additional insights and suggestions on how we might best employ these tools ethically to advance the equitable use of AI to assist our communities.

We recommend that community and economic development scholars and practitioners:

- Disclose the use of any AI tools in the introduction or methods section of a product to provide transparency.
- Describe in detail in the appropriate locations through footnotes or other appropriate citation methods in which parts of the text/data are affected.

- AI tools may have inherent limitations and biases in their application to specific identity groups. If known, explain these limitations and biases in an appropriate footnote or appendix.
- AI tools may also pose ethical challenges in issues of data security and privacy. Be sure to explain how data security and privacy are not compromised in your use of AI.
- No AI tool will be accepted as a credited author on a project. That is because any attribution of authorship carries with it accountability for the work, and AI tools cannot take such responsibility.

Deliverables

The lead Co-Learning Plan author is expected to facilitate the following activities and produce the following deliverables:

1. Submit a **15-page Co-Learning Plan** of publishable quality by July 30, 2027.
2. Submit an **Executive Summary of up to two pages**.
3. Deliver a **webinar or video** on findings and recommendations, if requested.
4. If any work is done on the project after the completion of the Co-Learning Plan, an **Addendum** (maximum 5 pages) should be prepared for documenting additional work or changes to the project that occurred before the annual REI event.
5. Present the Co-Learning Plan at the **annual REI Summit in July/August 2027**.
6. Participate in a **post-project survey** to evaluate the outcomes of your project.

Key Dates

- **December 11, 2026**: Application Deadline
- **January 2027:** Notice of Awards
- **February 25, 2027**: Deadline for First Draft of Co-Learning Plan
- **April 1, 2027**: Deadline for Second Draft of Co-Learning Plan
- **May 6, 2027**: Deadline for Third Draft of Co-Learning Plan
- **June 24, 2027:** Deadline for Fourth Draft of Co-Learning Plan
- **July 2027:** Final Report & Slide Deck for Innovate Michigan! Summit Due
- **July/August 2027** - Present at Innovate Michigan! Summit
- **August 2027:** Addendum Due

Questions

Please contact the REI Project Coordinator at rei@msu.edu or 517-353-9555 with any questions, comments, or concerns. You can also view the REI website at reicenter.org.

2027 Application for REI Co-Learning Plan

Author(s) / Investigator(s) Information

Name and Title:

Organization:

Email: Phone:

Other Authors, Experts, or Partners (please include any titles and contact information):

Qualifications

Describe your knowledge and work experience relevant to the topic. Explain how you are best suited to address this topic.

REI Innovative Economic Development Topical Area of Interest

Indicate ONE of the topics below for which you'd like to author a Co-Learning Plan.

- ☐ 1. Building Regional Capacity for Energy-Secure Economic Development
- ☐ 2. Building Public Trust in Economic Development: A Community-Centered Approach
- ☐ 3. Generational Wealth and Community Prosperity
- ☐ 4. Supporting Michigan Manufacturing in the AI Economy
- ☐ 5. Autonomous Systems Supply Chain
- ☐ 6. Rural Health Capacity as Economic Infrastructure
- ☐ 7. NDAs in Publicly Funded Economic Development Projects
- ☐ 8. Other

Title of Proposed Co-Learning Plan

Co-Learning Plan Abstract (100-150 words)

Pre-Submission Checklist

Confirm completion of the following tasks before submitting your application on or before December 11th, 2026 at 5pm EST.

- ☐ I have included a detailed project narrative (3 pages double-spaced, ¾" margins, 12-pt font) that includes the sections requested.
- ☐ I have included a brief budget summary following the parameters specified, with total costs not exceeding $5,000. This summary is no more than 1 page.
- ☐ I have provided links to two professional writing samples. If necessary, writing samples can instead be attached and do not count toward page limit described below.
- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood all details surrounding the authorship of a Co-Learning Plan. I agree to meet the timeline and deliverables specified in this Call for Co-Learning Plan Authors.
- ☐ My project application consists of no more than 6 pages (this application counts as 2, then 3 for the project narrative, and 1 for the budget summary). If able, please combine all Items in your project application into a single PDF.

Once finished, please submit your completed application to the REI Project Coordinator at the Center for Community and Economic Development by emailing rei@msu.edu or via mail to: *Michigan State University, 1615 E. Michigan Avenue, Lansing, MI 48912*. Thank you for your interest in REI and sharing your project with us. We hope to work with you in the future.