

**Southwest Michigan Prosperity Initiative
Region 8
Microgrant Request
August 2019**

Submitted by:

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1. Project Description (limited to two pages)

- a. Describe the project, the need(s) it intends to alleviate and the communities and/or populations it will serve or positively impact.**

The Supplemental Assistance for Funding Expenses (SAFE) Project will assist individuals receiving assistance from Michigan Works! Southwest in Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties by providing gap funding for participant expenses that are not covered by other programs or that exceed local or state identified limits. These expenses will assist in eliminating participant barriers to successfully completing training and/or gaining and retaining employment, including, but not limited to childcare fees and deposits, fine and fees, and appropriate work clothing.

- a. Describe how the project will accomplish one (or more) of the Prosperity Plan goals/opportunities.**

The SAFE Project will accomplish several Prosperity Plan goals under the area of Education, including:

- Promoting accessibility and opportunities for participants to participate in education and skilled training programs.
 - The SAFE Project will offer additional support to participants who are unable to attend training due to issues and barriers that are unable to be fully addressed by other programs. Additional supports provided through this funding may include transportation to and from training, testing fees, and training materials.
- Encourage a culture of learning by providing opportunities for all learners.
 - With the added benefit of the SAFE Project, Career Coaches will be able to encourage participants to look into trainings that match their career goals and allow for participants to complete multiple trainings in their field of interest.
- Encouraging and promoting the personal and regional economic benefits of lifelong learning.
 - Through the removing of financial barriers, the SAFE Project will make it possible for participants to get trained in their community and develop local contacts to assist in obtaining employment locally. By upskilling the local workforce, the demand of local employers for qualified workers will also be addressed, ultimately benefiting the community as a whole. Assistance will also be available for individuals not interested in a training, but who need supports to obtain or maintain employment.
- The SAFE Project will also support:
 - Adult education
 - Michigan Works! Southwest participants, co-enrolled in Adult Education, may receive funding assistance to provide basic school supplies and other class materials for participants through SAFE, as appropriate.
 - Credential acquisition
 - The SAFE Project may assist participants with fees associated with training opportunities, including testing costs, and support for individuals to receive industry recognized certifications.
 - Career exploration
 - Career Coaches will meet one-on-one with participants, who receive resources through SAFE, to discuss and explore potential jobs and career paths, with a focus on local labor market information and projections.

The SAFE Project will also accomplish the following goals under the area of Regional Prosperity Initiative Strategies, including:

- Encouraging collaboration among public and nonprofit sectors
 - This project will help strengthen existing partnerships while also fostering new connections possible through providing additional funding and resources.
- Encouraging coordinated strategic asset management across all four counties
 - With more options for resources available through SAFE, Michigan Works! Southwest staff will ensure effective communication strategies are in place with community partners and organizations to effectively coordinate efforts across the community and determine the best opportunities and resources for customers.

2. Organizational Description – Limited to one half of a page

- a. Briefly describe the organization(s) that will complete the work outlined in the project.**
 - i. Outline relevant experience, organizational structure, team who will work on the project, and other information you may deem appropriate.**
 - ii. Describe the ability and capacity of the organization(s) to complete the project.**

Michigan Works! Southwest, the Employment Management Services Division (EMSD) of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, manages employment and training services for Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties under the state recognized Michigan Works! umbrella. The Michigan Works! system is demand driven and locally responsive, serving both job seeker and employer customers in the four-county area, through a variety of program and service options. During Program Year 2018, Michigan Works! Southwest Service Centers saw 116,404 visitors. In addition, during July 2019, Michigan Works! Southwest served 148 employers and connected 226 individuals to employment.

Through the operation of numerous local, state and federally funded workforce development programs, Michigan Works! Southwest has extensive experience in providing services to job seekers to support their path to gaining and maintaining employment and achieving self-sufficiency, including the administration of financial supports, similar to those being proposed through SAFE. Through utilizing the existing processes and staffing structure, Michigan Works! Southwest has the capacity to administer this program as proposed.

To administer SAFE programming, the following staffing is proposed:

- **Program Director:** The Program Director, currently providing oversight and management of numerous Michigan Works! Southwest programs, will be responsible for fund management.
- **Site Manager:** The Site Manager will be responsible for reviewing requests for services, from the Michigan Works! Southwest system, for the use of SAFE funding as well as verifying that no other program or community resources are available to provide the requested assistance.
- **Career Coaches:** Career Coaches, throughout the Michigan Works! Southwest system, will be responsible for identifying customers' needs and if the use of SAFE funds is necessary. Career Coaches will submit requests to the assigned Site Manager.

Through current programming, the Michigan Works! Southwest staff, outlined above, have experience identifying needs of customers, addressing barriers, researching community resources and requesting funding to meet the identified barriers and needs of individuals being served.

3. Partners (limited to one half of a page)

a. List all partners who will have an active role in the project and describe their role in the project

i. The partners may be those with whom you will collaborate for data, information, contacts, or other aspects of the project

ii. Including partners in your proposal will help clarify the breadth of involvement your proposal

Michigan State AFL-CIO Human Resources Development, Inc.: M-HRDI is a private non-profit (501 C 3) corporation, providing employment and training services statewide to unemployed and underemployed Michigan residents. M-HRDI currently provides WIOA Adult and Dislocated worker program services in the Michigan Works! Southwest area and will provide referrals to SAFE, leveraged support to SAFE Project participants, as well as co-enrollment and referral opportunities for qualified individuals.

Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (KRESA): KRESA provides a continuum of educational services and support to students, families, school districts, and communities, and currently provides WIOA Youth Services and Employment Services at Michigan Works! Southwest. KRESA will provide referrals to SAFE, leveraged support to SAFE Project participants, as well as co-enrollment and referral opportunities for qualified individuals.

Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office: The Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office will be an active partner to the SAFE Program, providing participant referrals to the Re-Entry Initiative for Successful Employment (RISE) Program, which seeks to increase employment attainment and remove barriers of inmates, through the use of an employment hub located in the Kalamazoo County Jail. By providing employment readiness skills to incarcerated individuals prior to their release, as well as beginning the process of job placement, individuals are better prepared for a successful transition into the community and workforce.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS): The Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) will also be a critical partner of the SAFE Program, referring individuals to both the PATH and FAE&T programs, as well as providing additional supports to clients.

Maintaining existing partnerships with other community organizations will be essential to the mission of the SAFE Project as an understanding of all local offerings and opportunities will be necessary to ensure services are not duplicated. SAFE Project staff will utilize existing relationships with community partners including Kalamazoo County Ready 4's, Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region, and many others, as well as foster new relationships with local organizations as opportunities are presented.

4. Project Timeline

a. If applicable, provide a timeline for each activity enumerated in the Project Description

Upon notification of award, partners identified in Section 3, would be notified of the opportunity presented by SAFE for the customers being served throughout the Michigan Works! Southwest system, as well as of the procedure to request funding for customers through the staffing and process identified in Section 2.

Funding would remain available to assist with barrier removal until all funds are exhausted.

5. Budget

a. The amount requested

b. An explanation of specifically how the funding is intended to be spent

Amount Requested: \$10,000. All funding will be used for direct client services to eliminate barriers to training and/or obtaining/maintaining employment. The intent of the SAFE program is to assist Michigan Works! Southwest customers with expenses not covered by other programs or community resources or exceeds state and local identified limits.

Intended use includes funding to support:

- **Childcare**
 - A critical barrier reported by individuals with dependents is the ability to secure affordable childcare that meets the needs of the individual's schedule, allowing them to take advantage of training, work experience, and employment opportunities. Though the Department of Health and Human Services can assist individuals with finding approved childcare sites, they do not provide funding to assist with the upfront, non-refundable deposit cost.
- **Transportation**
 - Another common barrier reported by individuals participating in Michigan Works! Southwest programs is transportation. Many individuals who are unemployed, or underemployed, rely on public transportation, which has limited hours and routes, as well as limited availability in the rural communities in the four county Michigan Works! Southwest area. In addition, transportation related barriers commonly reported include vehicle repairs and ongoing maintenance, costs of insurance and licensing fees, and gasoline. Though many Michigan Works! Southwest programs offer assistance to address these barriers, state policy sets limitation on the amount and occurrences of the assistance provided.
 - Re-Entry Initiative for Successful Employment (RISE), a program serving recently released from the Kalamazoo County Jail, also often find transportation to be a barrier. Currently there is no funding available for RISE participants to assist in obtaining bus tokens, making job search and obtaining employment extremely difficult post-release. Participants are also less likely to continue following up with their Career Coach upon re-entry because they cannot afford to make the trip to the Michigan Works! Southwest Service Center, resulting in returning citizens receiving less community support than is available to them.
- **State IDs/Licenses**
 - Although Kalamazoo County introduced its own county ID last year, many employers still require a valid driver license or state ID to obtain employment, and similar programs are not available in the other three counties of the service area.
- **Fees**
 - Participants often report barriers with payment of fines and fees due to criminal background, driving related charges and numerous other circumstances, such as back payments on child support, and with limited options for assistance throughout the community, this funding would be used to support payment of these to assist in successful employment placement and self-sufficiency. Specifically, Michigan Works! Southwest has partnered with the Kalamazoo County Jail for the Re-Entry Initiative for Successful Employment (RISE) Program to assist returning citizens in their transition back into the community. Individuals served through this program often have fees when they are reintroduced into their community which can be difficult for individuals to address while working to secure employment.
- **Training**
 - Current programs offered through Michigan Works! do allow for certain types of training – mainly aimed toward the service and healthcare industries. With the SAFE Project there will be additional supports to assist with barriers related to training such as transportation to and from training, materials not covered by other funding, etc.

Having funding to assist in these areas would allow participants to focus on completing training and gaining and retaining employment, ultimately resulting in a more skilled and engaged workforce within the communities served by Michigan Works! Southwest.