Lifelong Soft Skills Framework: Creating a Workforce that Works

April 2012

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Abstract

The Lifelong Soft Skills Framework identifies basic or foundational skills for workplace success. It focuses on identifying soft-skills development as a lifelong effort; promotes incremental growth or reinforcement of skills by increased coordination between stakeholders; and encourages increased collaboration with employers by every level of education to identify key soft skills. Extensive outreach was made to organizations involved in soft-skill development and employers who indicated that many employees did not have the skills for workplace success. This report identifies key recommendations to moving forward. The primary objectives are to raise public awareness of the importance of soft skills in the workforce and to build support and commitment from stakeholders to ensure the workforce is ready to succeed in the 21st century.

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Executive Summary

As Southeast Michigan's economy moves forward and employers begin to hire again, there is one set of skills that every employer is looking for in every employee. Regardless of sector, industry, occupation, or level, the vast majority of employers consider *soft skills* to be an essential component of workplace success. Soft skills are sometimes known as foundational skills or employability skills. They are generally considered to be non-technical skills that include Personal Traits such as work ethic and judgment; Learned Academic Skills such as basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic digital literacy; and Life Skills such as teamwork and time management. While some soft skills may be more important in certain occupations, most soft skills are broadly applicable and are essential for workplace success at every level of an organization. For a complete list of the skills in the Framework, please see the Matrix on page 6.

The Talent Task Force, created by SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, and MAC, the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, has developed a Lifelong Soft Skills Framework. This framework is a plan that identifies 18 basic skills for workplace success and documents some of the efforts to teach, reinforce, model, and assess these skills by eight major stakeholder groups. Stakeholders include education, workforce development, and employers, but also parents and the community.

The framework emphasizes the need for a lifelong approach to developing and enhancing soft skills because many of these skills are built incrementally and need to be refreshed over time to reflect career and education changes. The current lack of coordination among stakeholders has led to a disjointed approach that reduces reinforcement and consolidation of skills. This results in higher staff turnover, reduced productivity, and lower customer satisfaction. Lack of soft skills also has a dramatic negative impact on an individual's ability to improve their situation. Without basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, they cannot pursue training or education that is increasingly necessary, even for entry level jobs.

The issue of soft skills development has been a particular challenge for educators and employers alike because despite their importance in workplace productivity, they have always taken a back seat to technical or academic courses in the education system. At the same time, they have not been clearly identified by employers in their hiring processes. The term "soft skills" itself is negatively compared to the more important sounding "hard skills" or "technical skills," further impeding the likelihood of prioritizing these essential skills, except in specific settings such as the Earn and Learn program which "upskills" adults to prepare for training and employment. Unlike technical skills, it is difficult to measure or evaluate success in soft skills, although it is clear where they are lacking. As Talent Task Force member Phil Rios states, "Soft skills are not necessarily a certificate, but a frame-of-mind issue."

The Lifelong Soft Skills Framework addresses many of the challenges faced by stakeholders in raising awareness of the need for building an incremental, comprehensive system for developing soft skills among current and future workers.

The main objectives of the framework are to:

- Raise awareness of links between soft skills and success in the workplace.
- Identify key soft skills and connect stakeholders that have a vested interest in supporting collaborative initiatives that promote soft skills.
- Develop policy recommendations and advocate for strengthening and integrating soft skills curriculum and funding.
- Promote best practices in soft skill development initiatives.

- Provide technical assistance on developing and enhancing soft skills training, benchmarking, and assessment.

While the Talent Task Force, SEMCOG, and MAC are committed to promoting soft skills, some of these objectives need to be part of a larger coordinated effort by partners who will most benefit from a more highly skilled workforce. The framework does not prescribe specific roles or actions for any one group, but does encourage collaboration among stakeholders in business, labor, education, government, workforce development, economic development and nonprofits, as well as policy makers to develop solutions that address soft skill policy, practices, and structural enhancements. This report also identifies how best practices are almost always a collaborative effort by different stakeholders.

There have been many impressive efforts related to soft skills development in education, workforce development, and adult education. There are also assessment tools and software that benchmark standards in soft skill attainment. The SEMCOG/MAC Talent Task Force's Lifelong Soft Skills Framework recognizes these, but focuses on:

- Identifying soft skills development as a lifelong effort.
- Promoting incremental growth or reinforcement of skills by increased coordination between stakeholders.
- Encouraging and facilitating increased collaboration with employers by every level of education to identify key soft skills.

SEMCOG/MAC performed extensive outreach to organizations involved in soft skill development and employers who indicated that many employees did not have the skills for workplace success. This outreach provided valuable information on:

- Best practices in soft skill development.
- Challenges faced by stakeholders.
- Policy recommendations to address and enhance soft skill development.

The main recommendations are summarized below. Further recommendations on actions for each of the stakeholder groups can be found in the main report.

Key Recommendations

- Raise public awareness of the importance of soft skills through a media campaign that identifies how work readiness in a community can be an economic development tool.
- Emphasize soft skills in the core K-12 education curriculum and make connections with employability and life success.
- Encourage employers to participate in advisory committees for core curriculum similar to their participation in committees for career technical education.

One of the primary objectives of the framework is to build support and commitment from the stakeholders. This does not prescribe specific actions to change their processes or priorities, but encourages participation in discussions and programs that result in a more nimble workforce. There are major benefits to all stakeholders in having a student body or workforce with basic soft skills, but in addition, there are huge benefits to society, the economy, and the ability of Southeast Michigan to rebuild the regional economy to new strengths.

Introduction

The SEMCOG/MAC Talent Task Force was created to address the talent-related strategies in *Increasing Jobs and Prosperity in Southeast Michigan*, Southeast Michigan's first comprehensive economic development strategy that was adopted by the SEMCOG Executive Committee and the MAC Board of Directors and approved by the United States Economic Development Administration in 2010. This blueprint for economic development in a region devastated by the decline of the manufacturing sector focused on leveraging business climate, community assets, and people/talent to rebuild the economy.

The Talent Task Force is made up of representatives of business, labor, education, government, workforce, and economic development and nonprofits. The Task Force identified the key talent-related issues facing the region that needed to be addressed to move the economy forward. The most common challenge was identified as a shortage of soft skills by virtually all employers, regardless of sector, industry, occupation or level. Soft skills are not just a challenge for entry level employees but for highly educated professionals too. The Framework was developed primarily to respond to employer's needs, but also raise awareness and assist in the development of solutions for educators and other stakeholders by identifying best practices and successful soft skill strategies.

Talent is increasingly considered part of every region's economic development strategy. In his Message on Talent in December 2011, Governor Rick Snyder stated that:

"In the 20th century, the most valuable assets to job creators were financial and material capital. In a changing global economy, that is no longer the case. Today, talent has surpassed other resources as the driver of economic growth."

The common complaint about the "skills gap" is often considered to be a technical skills shortage. Lack of certified IT professionals, trained welders, or a general shortage of skilled workers in growth industries results in jobs remaining unfilled. In many cases, people can be trained to do these jobs with short-term training or retooling, if they have the capacity to learn and opportunities for training. Soft skills provide workers with the ability to respond to new opportunities. The restructuring of Southeast Michigan's economy increases the need for a nimble workforce that has core competencies in soft skills and can learn new technical skills as economic conditions fluctuate or change. The task force recognized that technical skills can be taught, while soft skills are sometimes more experience-based and need to be reinforced throughout a person's lifetime. People may be hired for their technical skills but retaining their positions is dependent on their ability to leverage their soft skills through effective communication, teamwork, and understanding of basic rules.

While talent is a collection of soft and hard skills, including the ability to function successfully in the workplace, economic growth in a global economy is based on competitive advantages including creativity and innovation, which are more related to soft skills than technical skills. This is reinforced by the following comment from IBM:

More than ever, the traditional "bricks-and-mortar" drivers of economic growth are giving way to an economy based on "brains and creativity." ... As a result, the skills, aptitude, knowledge, creativity, and innovation of a workforce – which collectively can be viewed as the talent pool in the economy – have become increasingly important drivers of economic growth and activity.

Soft skills have long been an issue for employers. While advertisements for jobs emphasize technical skills or credentials, the need for soft skills is implicit in every position. Engineers and other professionals

need to have communications and teamwork skills to be effective, while health care professionals and service-sector employers are increasingly emphasizing customer service skills.

The Oakland County Skills Needs Assessment Project survey of 115 Emerging Sector industry companies found that the top jobs identified across all sectors were consistently technical in nature, but "*the technical skills associated with a given job represent the minimum skill set to complete the tasks associated with the job, but ...the Analytical/Communication and Interpersonal skills are those that distinguish individuals that are highly successful within a particular job.*"

In addition, Southeast Michigan's aging population and the retirement of many baby boomers is expected to hinder economic growth in the future as the region faces a shortage of workers. This can be partly addressed by increasing the skill levels of people currently unable to participate in the workforce because of lack of skills. Encouraging the employment and training of populations previously left out of the workforce is in the interest of long-term economic development and Southeast Michigan's future prosperity. On a national scale, it is estimated that the United States will have to add about 25 million workers to continue economic growth. To succeed in the global economy, more emphasis must be placed on increasing cultural awareness among students and employees at all levels. The life skills components of the framework address this issue at a basic level by encouraging acceptance of diversity, flexibility, and adaptability.

Lifelong Soft Skills Framework

Numerous lists, definitions, and categories of soft skills have been developed over time by educators, workforce development professionals, and others, but they tend to focus on a particular audience which limits their applicability and opportunities to reinforce skills. The Talent Task Force's Lifelong Soft Skills Framework is based on the notion that these skills need to be taught, modeled and reinforced over time by different stakeholders. While the form and style of teaching may differ depending on the stakeholder's needs and strengths, it needs to build upon and complement previous efforts.

The matrix identifies the 18 soft skills and the eight stakeholder groups that make up the framework. The skills are divided into three main categories:

- Personal traits
- Academic learned skills
- Life skills

The stakeholders are:

- Parents
- Community
- Early childhood
- K-12
- Adult education
- Post secondary education
- Workforce development
- Employers (including Labor)

The matrix also suggests the most appropriate stakeholder role(s), whether teaching, modeling, reinforcing, and assessing soft skills –as defined by the Talent Task Force. However, organizations within each of these stakeholder groups may focus on a different function or engage in all of them. This will depend on their priorities and resources available. Ultimately, the goal of the framework is to ensure that the region has a workforce with both the soft and technical skills needed to respond to employers' needs and enable Southeast Michigan's economy to grow.

Lifelong Soft Skills Framework: Skills and Stakeholders

	Parents	Community	Early Childhood	K12: General	Post-secondary Education	Adult Education	Workforce develop-ment	Employer-based (incl. Labor)
Personal Traits								
Ethics	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Initiative	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Judgment (personal)	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Positive Attitude	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Self Confidence	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Strong Work Ethic	TM	RM	TR	TR	R	TR	RA	ARM
Academic Learned Skills								
Basic digital literacy		T	TRA	TA	A	TA	TRA	A
Good Communications Skills	TRA	TR	TRA	TRA	TRA	TRA	TRA	TRA
Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic	T	TR	T	TRA	TRA	TRA	RA	RA
Planning/Problem Solving/ Analytical Skills	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TMA

	Parents	Community	Early Childhood	K12: General	Post-secondary Education	Adult Education	Workforce develop-ment	Employer-based (incl. Labor)
Life Skills								
Accepting Criticism	T	R	TR	TR	R	R	R	RA
Accept Diversity/ Dealing with Harassment	T	TMR	MR	MR	MR	TM	T	TA
Basic Financial Literacy	T	TA		T		T	T	A
Flexibility/Adaptability/ Adversity	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	TR	TRA
Problem Solving	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TRMA
Teamwork	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TRMA
Time Management	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TRMA
Conflict Management	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TM	TTMA

This matrix design was developed by the SEMCOG/MAC Talent Task Force. Input on the role of each stakeholder was provided by participants at the Outreach meetings.

T – Training
R – Reinforcement
M – Modeling
A – Assessment

These 18 skills were selected because they are key to workplace success. Although some may be more important to certain occupations than others, they are all important basic skills. The task force did not include higher level soft skills such as project management, which employers are more likely to include in internal training for leaders or as needed by staff. Several of the skills could be listed in more than one category but only problem solving is listed in two.

The framework does not include definitions because each stakeholder may wish to define them to meet their needs. However, Appendix B includes links to common soft skills programs that include definitions.

In general, parents and the community have more of a role in modeling and teaching skills, while the role of education is to teach and reinforce, and for workforce development and employers to assess. However, it is up to each stakeholder group to assess their role in this framework from a practical perspective. For example, requiring additional soft skills programs in K-12 may not be realistic without increased funding or changes to the state curriculum. At the same time, employers may hire employees with strong technical skills but limited soft skills and decide to train them on soft skills to develop a more diverse workforce. Lastly, while the framework identifies parents as vital to development of soft skills, it also needs to be acknowledged that not all parents have the capacity or knowledge to do this and public policy has limited ability to influence them. However, a lifelong framework has to recognize the importance of parents and the community because they can, and in many cases do play an important role.

The framework was developed in response to the needs specifically identified by employers and it is anticipated that they will be supportive of efforts to create a workforce with skills needed for workplace success. To engage parents who may not have the means to teach and model soft skills, connecting with community groups and faith-based organizations may be an effective way of providing soft skills to children before they enter school. There are several efforts by community development organizations, community groups, and public schools to support soft skills development within the community for both children and adults.

In some cases, the different categories of soft skills may be addressed together, or training may focus on an individual skill. It is up to the stakeholder to decide which makes more sense for them. In addition, while training may be classroom-based or experiential, assessments tend to be Web-based. Henry Ford Health Systems has found that classroom-based soft skills training is the most effective, while technical training is just as effective on-line or through other methods.

A priority for the framework is that training is age-and skill-appropriate. Certain skills need to be introduced early on, but should be reinforced as appropriate in the future. For example, ethics is a personal characteristic that is vital for employees, but needs to have been taught and modeled effectively while an individual is still young. It is also a key element in post-secondary education, particularly for professional degrees. While customer service is not a soft skill specifically identified in the framework, many personal traits and life skills can increase an individual's ability to provide better customer service. These attributes include positive attitude, initiative, good communications, and problem solving. There are basic elements across customer service training, whether future medical professionals are being trained for improved bedside manner or customer service representatives at AAA Michigan are being trained to help people involved in vehicle incidents.

SEMCOG and MAC began the process of building support for the framework by jointly developing it with the diverse membership of the Talent Task Force. In addition, they undertook an extensive outreach effort. The list of organizations that provided input before publication can be found in Appendix A. This engagement resulted in the policy recommendations. There are key recommendations to support raising awareness of soft skills and more specific process or administrative recommendations for several stakeholder groups.

For state policy recommendations, SEMCOG and MAC will need support from the task force to advocate for regulatory or administrative changes. For the sector recommendations, SEMCOG and MAC request that task force members work to make changes or incorporate the concepts of the framework within their organizations, sectors, and peer groups.

A final consideration of the framework is how to measure success. The framework does not identify specific measures, but encourages other organizations to measure success as they implement recommendations.

Best Practices in Soft Skills Development

Many programs related to soft skills development are coordinated by education, workforce development, and employers. Notable programs such as the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* (SCANS), *Michigan Employability Skills Training Standards*, and *The Employability Skills Portfolio* identified key soft skills and implementation strategies for specific sectors. In many cases, these were not fully implemented due to funding issues and other factors, but remain valuable reminders that soft skills have been a challenge for employers and educators for many years.

A recent addition to the discussion is the Partnership for 21st Century Skills's *Framework for 21st Century Learning*. P21is a national organization that advocates for 21st Century readiness for every American student in every school. It provides "tools and resources to help the U.S. education system keep up by fusing the 3Rs and 4Cs (critical thinking and problem solving; communication; collaboration; and creativity and innovation)." It recognizes that some schools are providing this but many are not, and advocates for policies that would support this framework for all schools.

From a practical perspective, the main challenges remain the lack of consistency among providers and the limited focus on building upon previous soft-skill development. Many state and local programs use the nationally recognized *WorkKeys* program as the foundation, while employers are increasingly using customer service models as the basis for soft skills assessments. The different approaches reflect different priorities. The framework does not prescribe specific content, but emphasizes the need for a holistic, incremental approach to soft-skill development to ensure that workers have a range of skills when they enter (or re-enter) the workforce. Credentials are of growing importance and there are many certifications for technical skills, but there is still limited adoption of common soft skills credentials that are acceptable across sectors and employers. More discussion on this issue is needed to both raise the profile of soft skills and create a credential in which employers have confidence.

While the framework focuses on basic soft skills, there are additional soft skills required by certain occupations. In some cases, these could be considered higher-level skills. For example, Hewlett Packard considers the following skills for their entry level IT positions in Michigan – ability to plan, execute, and implement projects; creativity and innovation; decision making; and being a self-starter.

A number of examples of successful programs are listed below by stakeholder group. The program objectives vary based on the interest of the organization, but each of the programs has had an impressive level of success that could be replicated either in its current state or a modified version.

Key characteristics of successful soft skills programs include:

- collaboration with different stakeholders in establishing and implementing programs
- public-private funding that provides additional flexibility and the ability to be innovative
- training that offers state or national certification that is widely recognized and
- programs that integrate soft skills within a broader framework

Parents
Parents play a vital role in the educational development of their children, but public policy has a limited influence on the education choices made by parents. It is often up to groups, such as the United Way, to equip parents with resources and awareness of how they can influence their child's educational development. The *Born Learning* program is "an innovative public engagement campaign that helps parents, caregivers, and communities create quality early learning opportunities for young children." It is

based on building relationships with young children to help them gain the confidence and security needed to learn by using everyday connections to teach basic skills. In addition, Focus: HOPE runs a Parent Academy which is a coaching program for parents of children enrolled in their programs.

Community-Based Programs

As talent becomes increasingly recognized as key to economic growth, more and more organizations are getting involved in preparing the future workforce. From community development corporations to faith-based groups to local non-profits, workforce development is becoming part of their mission. This is particularly common in lower income areas with at-risk populations.

Best Practice

Program Name: *Generation E*

Coordinating Organization: Generation E Institute

Objective: Generation E Institute is a Battle Creek-based, non-profit organization that teaches entrepreneurial skills to middle and high school students by partnering with public schools, community organizations, and 4H groups. The training includes a strong soft skills component focusing on table manners, phone etiquette, conversational skills, making presentations, appropriate dress, and interviewing techniques. Every student is expected to start a business as part of the training. Although the courses encourage entrepreneurship, there is an understanding that some of the graduates will go on to work for other organizations.

The courses range from an 18-week credit course taught to high school students that is equivalent to three college credits, to courses for "at-risk" students that include an 18-week course that counts as half an English credit and a half credit for student recovery. Gen E also customizes its courses for career technical education. This may include the entire 18-week course for a marketing and business career track, or an eight-week, once-a-week class for welding or technology tracks. For middle school students, Gen E is working with 4H programs in Oakland and Macomb Counties; they are generally after-school programs related to community involvement. In Detroit, courses focus on community gardens.

Although not all students who complete this course continue with the business they begin during the training, they learn valuable business and life skills that can translate into any future career endeavor.

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Early Childhood

During the 2,000 days between birth and their 1st day of kindergarten, 90 percent of [a child's] brain is developed. Brain research shows us how the nutrition, nurturing, and early learning experiences children receive during this critical period literally shapes the way their brains will function. (Great Start Macomb)

Michigan's Great Start program is a statewide initiative to foster school readiness and lifetime success. It is based on improving well being and social competence for emerging cognitive abilities – the "bricks and mortar that comprise the foundation of human development." The roles of parents, the community, and early childhood educators in a child's soft skills development are integrally linked; positive reinforcement increases the chances of school readiness.

The United Way for Southeastern Michigan provides funding for 6,000 children entering kindergarten every year as part of a $4 million grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. They

work with organizations such as ACCESS, Macomb Intermediate School District, and Vanguard Community Development Corporation to provide early childhood education as well as evaluation of programs, data collection, and capacity building.

Southwest Solutions, a Detroit based community development organization runs the *Early Learning Communities* (ELC) program at five sites in the city. This program provides free training and resources to parents and caregivers to prepare children to be "ready to learn" when they enter school. It is funded by United Way of Southeastern Michigan and the foundation community. The program mentors and supports parents by providing lessons in health and safety, conflict resolution, child development, and learning through play. It also provides access to video segments produced by United Way and Detroit Public Television with tips on interacting with children and stimulating interest in learning.

K-12

K-12 has traditionally been held accountable for providing soft skill training and development to students, but with increased academic requirements, focus on testing and other expectations, soft skills development often takes a back seat unless it can be integrated into the core curriculum. Students may not have been exposed to soft skills through teaching or modeling prior to this by parents or the community, putting more stress on the K-12 system. As Jamie Vollmer, businessman and public school advocate said in *Schools Cannot Do It Alone,* "Our schools are no longer being told to teach America's children. They are being told to raise them."

Increasingly, K-12 is looking at different ways of incorporating soft skills programming into the curriculum. In some cases, this means working with community groups to bring programs into the schools, through after school or summer programs, and through programs such as the *A Game. Bring Your A Game to Work* is a work ethic training and certification program for youth and adults. The program instills and reinforces the seven fundamental values of work ethic:

- Attitude
- Attendance
- Appearnace
- Ambition
- Accountability
- Acceptance
- Appreciation

Currently *A Game* is being used with a pilot group of high school career and technical education students in the Wayne County RESA service area. More than 200 students will go through the program in the next six months. The Career Technical Education track that can be found in most school districts provides a good example of including career-specific soft skills as part of the curriculum.

The International Academy High School, which teaches to the International Baccalaureate diploma, requires certain additional courses for graduation including a career mentorship; self-directed product teams that link academic learning to a tangible product and organized process that evaluates thinking skills, team membership skills, and personal attributes; and required enrichment programs focusing on experiential and exploratory learning.

The Leader in Me is a national program that is becoming popular for teaching soft skills in K-12 schools using the principles of the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People.*[®.] It focuses on nurturing skills such as self-

confidence, teamwork, initiative, creativity, leadership, problem-solving, communication, diversity awareness, and academic performance.

However, these programs are not available to all schools. When asked to recommend a single change to their high school to better prepare them for life, a 2011-12 survey of graduates from 28 high schools in Macomb County indicated that emphasizing life skills in the curriculum (home economics, time management, and financial planning) would be the most valuable.

Best Practice

Program Name: *Oakland Schools Technical Campuses (OSTC)*

Coordinating Organization: Oakland Schools

Objective: Oakland Schools Technical Campuses provide high school juniors and seniors in Oakland County with a college-type environment for undertaking a two-year curriculum in one of nine different career clusters/tracks. These include biotechnology and environmental science; engineering and emerging technologies; business, management, marketing, technology; health sciences; culinary arts; and cosmetology. The most popular clusters are health sciences and transportation technology. The campuses provide students with career direction, college credits, and industry-based certifications, while fulfilling high school graduation requirements. There are four occupational skills technical campuses in Oakland County, each with 500-600 students. Students attend half day at OSTC and half day at their home high school for two years. Although Career Technical Education is often seen as an alternative for non-college bound students, 64 percent of OSTC graduates went on to post-secondary education in 2010. It provides core skills that enable graduates to go into higher education or apprenticeships through partnerships between education and employers.

All courses teach soft skills including networking, personal branding, ethics, leadership, diversity, life-work balance. Thirty percent of work habits are based on soft skills such as open mindedness, being on time, etc. Employers provide internships and work experience, while education provides digital learning, education, and certification. Employers are also involved in development of the curriculum through involvement on advisory committees.

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Program Name: *Next Generation Learning Program*

Coordinating Organization: Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS)

Objective: Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS) Next Generation Learning (NGL) program mobilizes educators, employers and community leaders to create a new generation of young people who will graduate from high school, college, and career-ready to compete successfully in the 21st century economy. This national program sponsored by Ford Motor Company has a curriculum that is teaching soft skills to over 140,000 students nationwide as well as increasing the number of students qualified in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Ford PAS focuses on transforming teaching and learning; redesigning high schools; and sustaining change through business and civic leadership in order to develop a culture of shared accountability and excellence. Essential practices include flexibility in applying academic knowledge and skills; problem solving; critical thinking; teamwork; communication; creativity and innovation; and global awareness. More than 600 schools in 27 states participate in the Ford PAS program. In Michigan, West Bloomfield High School and the Henry Ford Academy are among those that use the program. More information can be found at www.fordpas.org

Program Contact Person: Mike Schmidt, Ford Motor Company Fund, (313) 248-6833, mschmidt4@ford.com

Post Secondary Education

Many students meet the basic entrance requirements for post-secondary education, but do not have the work skills or general academic abilities to undertake college level courses. This results in the need for remedial courses, which add to the expense of college, but also increase the chances of the student not completing their education. This is a particular problem for community colleges where up to 60 percent of students need to enroll in one or more remedial classes. A number of programs can address this problem. Wayne State University has developed a new program to ensure student success in their four year degrees. *Alternative Pathways to Excellence* will go into effect in 2013 and provide students who are borderline for admissions with an eight-week prerequisite course focused on English, math, and success coaching.

In many cases, students have the academic capabilities but are deficient in soft skills. The Emerging Sectors Education Consortium received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to develop efficient and effective ways of delivering education and training to emerging sector firms. This included soft skills training for students and employees, and curriculum integration in high schools. The consortium is made up of eight public and private institutions of higher education as well as Oakland Schools and Oakland County Michigan Works.

Best Practices

Program Name: *Soft Skills Certificate*

Coordinating Organization: Oakland University

Objective: Oakland University is piloting a soft skills certificate with different groups at the university, identifying 12 areas of concentration including leadership, professionalism, and communications, with specific goals and outcomes for each. OU is partnering with Skillsoft, who will provide training in these areas. This program is being tested for leadership training and work-study students who are employed by the university while studying. Pre-test and post-tests will be administered to see the impact of the training. The nursing school is considering using this training as a non-credit add-on that is integrated into various programs.

Program Contact: Lori Crose, Strategic Programs, Oakland University, (248) 370-4861, llcrose@oakland.edu.

Program Name: *Soft Skills Defined Workshops*

Coordinating Organization: Walsh College

Objective: In 2011, Walsh College developed a series of soft skills training programs that provide skills participants can use immediately. The workshops were two-to-four hours in length and held on weeknights and weekend mornings on subjects such as interpersonal interaction, personal image, and branding and communication. The workshops were free-of-charge to Walsh students and alumni. The courses recognize that soft skills in the workplace are as important as strong business education. "The differentiator for job candidates and the hiring businesses are the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills. These skills can determine the strengths of a leader, teammate, listener, negotiator, and conflict mediator but aren't included in many curricula…" Courses provided hands-on training for professionals and students that is relevant and timely.

Program Contact: Victoria Scavone, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Walsh College, (248) 823-1207, vscavone@walshcollege.edu

Adult Education

As Southeast Michigan's economy continues its transformation to a knowledge-based economy, more and more employees will require post- secondary education – whether a two- or four-year degree or specific industry certification. This shift to credential-based training has reduced funding for adult education programs and left many adults behind. A report by the Council on Labor and Economic Growth, *Transforming Michigan's Adult Learning Infrastructure,* found that "44 percent of Michigan's adults have very minimal literacy skills, no greater than those necessary to perform simple, everyday activities" and 60 percent of students entering community colleges require remediation prior to engaging in post-secondary education. Lack of basic academic skills is a major barrier for many who seek credentials and workplace success. Improved adult learning has many advantages including financial stability, civic engagement, higher education attainment for future generations, higher levels of fiscal contribution, and higher rates of job creation and economic growth.

Best Practices

Program Name: *Earn and Learn*

Coordinating Organization: Southwest Solutions

Objective: *Earn and Learn* is a workforce development program mainly for at risk, chronically unemployed males aged 18-24 that are disconnected from workforce development and employment. The program provides a four week work readiness/"upskilling" program, followed by 32 weeks of supervised and subsidized work and study, and six months of unsupervised and unsubsidized full time work in high demand fields such as health care, IT, advanced manufacturing and others. It targets males in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park with a 6th -12th grade learning level, and who pass a drug test. It is funded by local and national foundations and the State of Michigan's Workforce Development Agency. The program is coordinated by Southwest Solutions on behalf of Focus: HOPE, ACCESS, Detroit Workforce Development Department, SEMCA, and Henry Ford Community College.

The work readiness component is a prerequisite for the work experience. Students attend a four week (160 hours) class in basic work expectations. They are instructed on how to show up on time (or early), how to dress appropriately, and what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. Resume writing and mock employment interviews are also part of the curriculum. Graduates receive nationally recognized certifications in first aid, CPR, and customer service issued by International Business Training Associates.

Program Contact: Linda West, Southwest Solutions, (313) 297-0070, lwest@swsol.org

Program Name: *Jump Start*

Coordinating Organization: Focus: HOPE

Objective: Focus: HOPE has a history of working with adults that are disconnected from education and employment. Recognizing the need to provide basic learning skills before embarking on career specific training, the organization has developed a number of short programs that ease adults into restarting their education. These include the *Jump Start* program. Students attend one week (35 hours) in a comprehensive introductory course designed to positively impact student's awareness and knowledge of the essential behaviors and skills necessary for success in the classroom and professional work environment. In this course, students establish note taking skills, incorporate effective study and test

taking skills, learn strategies to manage time, learn basic skills in personal networking, write resumes, understand and demonstrate interview preparedness, and learn the basics of professional dress.

Program Contact Person: Alexis Hollins, Focus HOPE, (313) 494-4743, hollina@focushope.edu.

Workforce Development

Between 2000 and 2010, Southeast Michigan lost almost 500,000 jobs, including many workers in manufacturing industries without any formal post-secondary education. They experienced the hardest time because the few companies that were hiring needed skills that many displaced workers did not have.

Workforce development programs in Michigan are largely funded by the Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, a program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. This law provides state formula grants and a network of "one-stop" shops. In Michigan, the 25 Michigan Works agencies (MWAs) coordinate local one-stop service centers that provide training, employment, and support services for workers and employers. The main focus of WIA is on short-term training and employment. There is limited soft skill training, although most agencies offer workshops on positive behavior and interviewing skills. Youth programs have a more comprehensive soft skill component focusing on such issues as self-esteem and healthy lifestyle.

The former Council for Labor and Economic Growth (CLEG) developed the *Michigan Employability Skills for Training Standards* to be used by the Michigan Works system. This would be part of a jobseeker's credentials. The training standards are part of a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) for Michigan that is based on ACT WorkKeys. WorkKeys is "a job skills assessment system measuring real-world skills. It connects work skills, training, and skill testing for educators and employers." The Training Standards include both academic and soft skills. The soft skills components are based on the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, and were developed to align with the Michigan Merit Core Curriculum as well as the Michigan Works System. The standards are a framework from which Michigan Works agencies could select components that reflect local employer demands, align with other training programs, and are available to all customers. However, due to funding and organizational changes these standards were not implemented.

Best Practices
Program Name: *Pre-employment Screening*

Coordinating Organization: Detroit Workforce Development Department

Objective: The Business Services Unit of the Detroit Workforce Development Department works closely with employers in various industries to pre-screen employees on skills required for specific jobs including soft skills, background tests, and drug testing. Almost every employer requests candidates with soft skills – particularly customer service skills. The department carries out workshops on interviewing skills and personal motivation, but has also developed customized screening tools and assessment tests along with its one-stop service centers. Soft skills are embedded into all of the training. The department is currently planning to develop a credential for customer service skills for job seekers.

Program Contact: Jose Reyes, Deputy Director, Detroit Workforce Development Department, (313) 628-2307, jreyes@detroitmi.gov.

Program Name: *The Essential Work Skills Program Certificate*

Coordinating Organization: Dennis Beson for Great Lakes Bay Michigan Works

Objective: This course is run over five days and provides soft skills training for JET (Jobs and Employment Training) and WIA program participants. It focuses on essential work skills such as reliability, positive attitude, and communications skills towards co-workers and customers/clients/patients. It covers all the NCRC components, plus additional ones such as writing cover letters. The program is composed of four hour trainings held on four consecutive days, followed by a fifth day that evaluates skills. The training is made up of role playing, written tests, and interviewing skills on positive attitude, communications, customer service etiquette, and reliability. It was developed by New Edge Technology in response to a survey of businesses in the Great Lakes Bay Michigan Works area in Bay City, Midland and Saginaw. This program is also used by Calhoun County Michigan Works. The program is estimated to provide a 15-20 percent boost to job chances.

Program Contact: Dennis Beson, President, New Edge Technology, (989) 233-0500, dennis@newedget.com.

Employers/Labor

Despite growth in knowledge-based industries and heightened need for technical skills, there is evidence that soft skills are still just as important. In 2008, Oakland County Workforce Development carried out a study of the skills needed by Emerging Sector businesses. It found that these firms, concentrated in areas such as advanced electronics and controls, biotechnology, medical devices, robotics, and six other technology-based sectors, require a bachelor's and/or graduate degree in math and science, plus English-language skills. However, it also concluded that, "Stakeholders could make the biggest impact by taking a 'back to basics' approach and address the universal need for improvement in the areas of human interaction abilities (people skills), business communication/acumen, and professionalism…regarding the critical need for coaching and training in appearance, work ethic, and business integrity."

While some businesses such as AAA Michigan and Henry Ford Health Systems have developed comprehensive employee development/training plans for their staff including some soft skills components, others face funding and organizational challenges that limit soft-skills training. They need assistance in providing training that is affordable and responds to their specific needs. Macomb Community College has responded by developing an extensive network of training programs designed specifically for employers in the areas of technical skills and soft skills.

Despite the importance of soft skills to workplace success, employers tend to invest more time and funding on technical- or employment-based training. One exception is customer service training which is increasingly common for both technical and service-oriented businesses. The hiring process may include questions to assess soft skills, but there is generally more emphasis on hiring for technical skills. The expectation is that most candidates who possess technical skills will also have basic soft skills. However, many employers are finding that new hires do not have the level of soft skills expected. This results in challenges for the business and the employee, especially for small companies that may not have an adequate training budget.

This issue can be addressed in several ways. Employers can be more active in influencing curriculum at K-12 and higher education so that educators incorporate this into the curriculum. They can also partner with Michigan Works agencies or other companies to raise awareness of needed soft skills.

Labor has a rich history of providing soft skills training both within traditional apprenticeship programs and through its strong mentorship philosophy originally developed to provide safe working conditions for workers.

Best Practices
Program Name: *Pre-Employment Assessment Tool (PEAT)*

Coordinating Organization: St. John Providence Health System

Objective: St. John's uses the Pre- Employment Assessment Tool (PEAT) for all potential new hires. This provides a number of scenarios and asks how a person would respond to them to test four areas of soft skills – including teamwork skills, customer service, and quality of work.

There are 76 questions in this pass/fail test. The answers are also analyzed to identify strengths and weaknesses. These may then be further developed during the interview stage along with discussion of technical skills and certifications. This test has been used for nearly seven years; some adjustments have been made over time. Once employed, any soft skills deficiencies will be dealt with through annual performance reviews, although there is a limited budget for this training.

Contact Person: James Flanegin, Corporate Director, Workforce Planning, (586) 753-1259, jim.flanegin@stjohn.org.

Program Name: *Succeed with ENERGY*

Coordinating Organization: DTE Energy

Objective: All employees play an important role in planning their career and goal attainment. DTE Energy is committed to partnering with their employees by providing goal setting, performance feedback, learning, and career opportunities needed to foster success. Succeed with ENERGY is an integrated approach to career development and performance management.

ENERGY Model Competencies illustrate the key characteristics, or competencies, needed for effective and impactful performance. DTE Energy included a competency-based approach to career development based on the belief that organizational and individual performance improves when employees have a clear understanding of what is expected of them; have the support of their leader; communicate openly; and understand how what they do supports organizational objectives.

The ENERGY Model Competencies are as follows:

- Executes with Edge (includes sub-competencies of Drives for Excellence and Makes Sound Decisions);
- Navigates Change (includes sub-competencies of Manages Change and Fosters Continuous Improvement);
- Engages People (includes sub-competencies of Fosters Teamwork and Develops Talent);
- Reflects Shared Values (includes sub-competencies of Models Integrity and Promotes Safety Commitment);
- Generates Business Focus (includes sub-competencies of Demonstrates Business Acumen and Drives Customer Focus); and
- Yields Results (includes sub-competencies of Translates Vision, Manages Performance and Drives Accountability).

The ENERGY Model Competencies, along with SMART performance goals are assessed formally twice a year; however consistent and constant feedback is an expectation. Both ENERGY Model Competencies and performance goals are calibrated by and between the different leaders within an organization to ensure consistency and equity among employees.

The ENERGY Model Competencies are used for all employees, with the exception of represented and contract workers. Pre-hire assessments are based on role-specific qualifications, experience, and educational requirements. The ENERGY Model facilitates the ongoing development of skills within the workplace.

Contact: Stacy Abbott, HR Manager - Fossil Generation, (313) 235-5856, abbotts@dteenergy.com

Program Name: *Energy Conservation Awareness Readiness (ECAR) for Construction Industry*

Coordinating Organization: Michigan HRDI

Objective: Michigan HRDI – a non-profit arm of the AFL-CIO that provides soft skills training – also coordinates the Energy Conservation Awareness Readiness (ECAR) program for construction industry jobs at the SEMCA Michigan Works Highland Park service center. This 10-week training course provides applicants in Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck with skills for state certification required for entry-level jobs in construction companies. The course targets low-income minorities, including women, for jobs in construction – an area where they are underrepresented.

The course teaches the fundamentals for construction jobs, including weatherization, scaffolding, and health and safety. However, the course also focuses on attitude, behavior, and attendance, and requires weekly presentations and regular written exams. These soft skills make the students better able to function in the workplace. About 70 percent of the course graduates get a job within a year of completion.

Contact: Ken Daugherty, Case Worker, Michigan HRDI, (313) 736-5502.

Policy Recommendations for Soft Skills Development

Key Recommendations

General

1. Raise public awareness of the importance of soft skills through a media campaign that identifies how work readiness in a community can be an economic development tool.

- This is similar to marketing a community's education attainment levels or the number of engineers in a region to attract certain types of businesses.

- The campaign could take the form of 30-second TV spots featuring business representatives identifying what skills and traits they are looking for in employees.

2. Partner with public/ private foundations to help fund and replicate successful soft skill pilot programs in other communities.

K-12

3. Emphasize soft skills in the core K-12 education curriculum and make connections with employability and life success.

- The Career Technical Education (CTE) curriculum provides a model for this. CTE includes soft skills in all program standards. They are an essential component in CTE's curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

- Enhance professional development opportunities through Intermediate School Districts for general education teachers to better align teaching and core curriculum with employer needs.

4. Support legislative efforts to allow for more flexibility for high school career training programs.

- This will ensure availability of workers in certain growth fields as current employees retire and jobs remain unfilled.

5. Continue career development discussions that begin in seventh grade through a student's high school years in collaboration with their parents.

- The Education Development Plan (EDP) process needs to be updated.

6. Expand Michigan Merit Exam testing to six WorkKeys components (produced by ACT) from the current three and advocate for employers to use as a tool to measure proficiency.

7. Encourage local school district foundations to promote soft skills by funding projects that help develop life skills.

Higher Education

8. Encourage higher education to be aligned with employer needs by developing skills needed in the workplace.

- While there may be some focus on career specific soft skills in professional and graduate degrees, this is less common in four-year degrees. With only a limited number of students continuing their education past a two- or four-year degree, it is important for higher education to reinforce or offer soft skills training.

Adult and Alternative Education

9. Include soft skills components in GED curriculum to enable this population to be better prepared for work.

Workforce Development

10. Incorporate the Michigan Employability Skills Training Standards within soft skills training programs for Michigan Works clients.

11. Increase public funding for soft skills training for incumbent workers to enable companies to stay in business by diversifying and reorganizing while continuing to fund soft skills for currently unemployed workers.

12. Increase the provision of pre-hiring soft skill assessment and screening services by Michigan Works Agencies to assist employers in their recruitment processes.

13. Include personal branding in social media and networking within Michigan Works based Soft Skills training workshops.

Employers/Labor

14. Encourage employers to participate in advisory committees for core curriculum similar to their participation in committees for career technical education.

15. Increase employer funding for soft skills training for current employees to develop skills needed to succeed in the job.

- Investing in soft skills training for incumbent workers has many advantages for the employer and employee. It provides employers with a more effective workforce without the considerable expense of hiring new staff and it also provides employees with more job security while helping to improve their productivity.

16. Expand Employee Assistance Programs to provide life skills counseling focused on sector specific needs.

- For public employees, this could include working with diverse customers.

17. Encourage employers to require and accept credentials for soft-skills training.

Next Steps

One of the primary objectives of the framework is to raise the bar on the importance of soft skills and build support and commitment from stakeholders. This does not prescribe specific actions or require changes to processes or priorities, but encourages participation in discussions and programs that result in a better prepared and more nimble workforce. There are major benefits to all stakeholders in having a student body or workforce with basic soft skills, but in addition, there are huge benefits to society, the economy, and the ability of Southeast Michigan to rebuild the regional economy to new strengths.

SEMCOG and MAC began the process of building support for the framework by developing it in partnership with the Talent Task Force. In addition, they undertook an extensive outreach effort. The list of organizations that provided input before publication can be found in Appendix A. This engagement resulted in the Policy Recommendations for Soft Skills Development. There are key recommendations to support raising awareness of soft skills and more specific process or administrative recommendations for each stakeholder group.

For the state policy recommendations, SEMCOG and MAC will need support from the task force to advocate for regulatory or administrative changes. For the sector recommendations, SEMCOG and MAC request that task force members work to make changes or incorporate the concepts of the framework within their organizations, peer groups, and sectors.

A final consideration of the framework is how to measure success. The framework does not identify specific measures, but encourages stakeholders to continue the discussion on how best to measure success. Implementing some of the best practices identified in the report in other communities or schools is encouraged and SEMCOG and MAC can help to facilitate discussions as appropriate.

Some suggestions for evaluating effectiveness of training include:

- **By component**
  - Post training assessment of students/employee.
  - Post training survey of trainees.
  - Post training observations by employers/teachers.
- **By stakeholder group**
  - K-12 Education: Test or survey of students at the time of graduation from elementary, middle, and/or high school, and achievement in WorkKeys assessments in the Michigan Merit Exam.
  - Workforce Development: Survey at completion of (Michigan Works) Training program.
  - Higher Education: Survey at completion of orientation training or other soft-skills-based training.
  - Employers:
    - Pre-assessment test for employment.
    - Annual review process during employment.
    - Exit interview by employer.
- **By number of participants**

− Entities that adapt their own programs based on the framework recommendations and best practices.

− Number of organizations that support the framework.

Appendix A: Outreach Meetings

February 2012

- February 2, 2012   Michigan League for Human Services Workforce Policy Group
- February 7, 2012   Career Transitions Committee of 21st Century Workforce (presentation)
- February 14, 2012   Mike Schmidt, Ford Motor Foundation (discussion)
- February 17, 2012   Steering Committee of the 21st Century Workforce Group (presentation)
- February 21, 2012   Greg Handel/Robert Troutman, Detroit Regional Chamber (discussion)
- February 28, 2012   SEMCOG Area Intermediate School Districts (presentation)

March 2012

- March 1, 2012   MI League for Human Services Workforce Policy Group (presentation)
- March 5, 2012   HUD Sustainability Consortium meeting
- March 8, 2012   Meeting with Dan Hill/Rosemary Abraham, AAA Michigan
- March 9, 2012   Christine Seppala, Strategic Staffing Solutions (conference call)
- March 13, 2012   Southeast Michigan Community College Consortium (presentation)
- March 16, 2012   Meeting with Kylee Mitchell, Detroit Regional Workforce Fund
- March 19, 2012   Jarrad Grandy, Statewide ISD CTE Directors (conference call)
- March 20, 2012   Oakland County Emerging Sectors Education Group (presentation)
- March 22, 2012   Vanguard Community Development Corp and Focus HOPE (conference call)
- March 28, 2012   Meeting with Larry Molner, University of Michigan
- March 30, 2012   Noel Baril, Ajay Parikh, Henry Ford Health Systems (conference call)

April 2012

- April 2, 2012   Robin Boyle, Wayne State University (phone)
- April 4, 2012   Meeting with Chris Wigent, Wayne RESA
- April 10, 2012   Discussion with Mark Gaffney, Phil Rios on labor-based soft skills programs
- April 12, 2012   *Earn and Learn* Consortium Leadership (presentation)
- April 18, 2012   SEMCA Workforce Development Board (presentation)

Appendix B: Stakeholder Input Form

SEMCOG/MAC Lifelong Soft Skills Training Framework: Stakeholder Input
The SEMCOG/MAC Lifelong Soft Skills Training Framework is a plan that identifies basic or foundational skills for workplace success. It provides a comprehensive structure for identifying key soft skills, recognizing effective programs, identifying gaps, and developing solutions in a coordinated manner that allows stakeholders to enhance and build upon past training. It applies to every occupation, sector, industry and level of employee.

1. Are soft skills among your employees, students or customers a challenge for your organizations?
   YES _____NO _____

2. Could the Framework be valuable to your organization?
   YES _____NO _____

3. Does your organization do any soft skills training, modeling, reinforcement or assessment?
   YES _____NO _____

4. If yes, please complete the following section:

Organization Name	
Type of Program (training, assessment, etc)	
Title of program	
Was this program developed in collaboration with employers or other stakeholders?	
Is this program used for <u>all</u> employees, customers and students or a subset?	
Contact Information for program coordinator (Name, phone number, email)	
How do you evaluate success of the program?	

Please provide a brief description of the project including website address for more information:

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Is there a state or federal policy change regarding soft skills that would help your organization?
YES _____NO _____

6. Please indicate any policy changes related to soft skills that would help your organization:

Please provide your contact information if you are willing to be contacted with further information:

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Please return to:
Naheed Huq
Plan Implementation
SEMCOG
Fax: 313 961-4869
E-mail: huq@semcog.org
Phone: 313 324-3356

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix C: Resources for Soft-Skills Development

Career Planning
Career Cruising – http://public.careercruising.com/us/en/about-us/

My Dream Explorer – https://www.mydreamexplorer.org/

Soft-Skill Development
The A Game – http://www.theagame.com/

Born Learning – http://www.bornlearning.org/default.aspx?id=33

Generation E Institute – http://www.genei.org/

The Leader In Me – http://www.theleaderinme.org//

Oakland Schools Technical Campus – http://www.ostconline.com/

Skillsoft – http://www.skillsoft.com/about/default.asp

State of Michigan Office of Career and Technical Education – http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_2629---,00.html

Soft-Skill Testing/Assessments
Fit Assessment – http://www.act.org/workkeys/assess/fit/faq.html

National Career Readiness Certificate – http://www.act.org/certificate/

WorkKeys – http://www.act.org/workkeys/

Soft-Skills Programs
The Employability Skills Portfolio –
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ441170&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ441170

Framework for 21st Century Learning – http://www.p21.org/overview/skills-framework

Michigan Employability Skills Training Standards – http://www.michigan.gov/documents/nwlb/MI-NCRC-FAQ-2-clr-Llewellyn_286834_7.pdf

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) –
http://wdr.doleta.gov/SCANS/whatwork/