

ASSOCIATIONS:

A Vital Force in Workforce Development

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Skill gaps, workforce shortages, and uncertain career pathways are among the most pressing challenges in today's labor market. Associations are stepping up as training providers, standard-setters, and conveners of solutions. Recent findings from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) confirm what Michigan leaders already know: associations are indispensable players in workforce development.

The Current Landscape

A 2024 ASAE survey found that 75% of associations report workforce shortages in their industries (ASAE, 2024a). The causes range from demographics and retirements (70%) to unattractive perceptions of the industry (53%) and competition from other sectors (46%). Nearly 68% of associations already operate workforce development programs, while another 18% plan to launch them soon.

These programs include credentialing, continuing education, apprenticeships, and partnerships with schools and employers. Importantly, associations are not working alone: 70% partner with universities, 40% with private firms, and one-third with government entities (ASAE, 2024a). This collaborative model reflects what is already happening in Michigan—associations aligning education, business, and regulation to strengthen talent pipelines.

Why Associations Matter

Associations bring three critical assets to workforce development:

Credibility—certifications and standards recognized by employers and regulators.

System perspective—convening educators, employers, and policymakers to identify needs early.

Scalability—networks and events that can quickly expand programs across regions.

Nationally, associations host more than 315,000 meetings annually, engaging nearly 60 million participants (ASAE, 2024b). In Michigan, this convening power translates into employers, educators, and policymakers designing real-time workforce solutions together.

Michigan's Workforce Challenges

Michigan's economy is dynamic, but the state faces persistent hurdles:

- **Higher unemployment** – 4.6% in 2024, above the national 4.0% average (BLS, 2024).
- **Underutilization** – when factoring in underemployment, the rate rises to 8.5% (BLS, 2024).
- **Labor force participation** – state leaders have set a goal of moving Michigan into the top 10 nationally, recognizing too many working-age adults remain outside the workforce (Detroit Regional Chamber, 2024).
- **Disparities** – Black Michiganders face unemployment rates nearly double those of white residents (Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, 2025).
- **Digital divide** – while nearly 90% of jobs require digital skills, about one-third of Michigan workers lack even basic proficiency (National Skills Coalition, 2023).

Associations are already helping address these gaps through micro-credentials, mentorship programs, equity-focused scholarships, and industry-aligned apprenticeships.

SPOTLIGHTS: Michigan Associations at Work

Michigan Golf Course Association: Apprenticeship



Workforce development often happens far from traditional classrooms. The Michigan Golf Course Association (MGCA) launched its Registered Apprenticeship Golf Course Maintenance Technician Program in 2022 to build a pipeline of skilled agronomy professionals.

The program blends hands-on learning with formal instruction and results in a nationally recognized credential. For an industry supporting nearly 60,000 workers and contributing \$6 billion annually to Michigan's economy, this pipeline is vital.

Courses like Boyne Golf and The Emerald report real benefits, while graduates step into skilled roles that keep operations thriving. As MGCA Executive Director Jada Paisley noted on MSAE's Insight podcast:

"This program opens doors to career paths people might never have considered, while giving our industry the skilled workforce it needs."

MGCA's apprenticeship illustrates what associations do best—creating pathways, closing skills gaps, and sustaining industries.

Michigan Licensed Beverage Association: Online TAM Training



The Michigan Licensed Beverage Association (MLBA) strengthens the state's hospitality workforce through its Techniques of Alcohol Management (TAM) online program, approved by the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC).

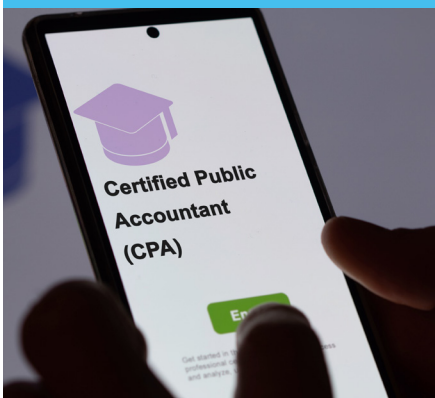
The training equips servers, bartenders, and managers to prevent over-service, check IDs properly, and reduce risks for both customers and establishments. Because many employers require MLCC-approved certification, TAM training improves

employability and enhances public safety.

"Our online TAM course makes it easy for people to get certified quickly while delivering the same quality training the industry relies on," explains MLBA Executive Director Scott Ellis.

By aligning workforce training with state regulation, MLBA ensures Michigan's hospitality sector remains safe, professional, and job-ready.

MICPA: Growing the CPA Pipeline



The Michigan Association of CPAs (MICPA) is tackling one of the state's most pressing professional shortages: CPAs. As accounting evolves from compliance work to strategic advising, the demand for qualified professionals continues to grow.

MICPA's Future CPAs program engages students and early-career professionals with mentorship, scholarships, school partnerships, and career resources. The association is also rethinking licensure requirements, advocating for flexibility around education and relevant experience to reduce barriers for nontraditional candidates.

In his Impact Podcast interview, MICPA President & CEO Bob Doyle highlighted the importance of inclusive pathways: *"Accounting is a great career not because you're stuck in it, but because it offers a variety of pathways to exciting opportunities."*

MICPA also helps small firms improve culture and retention by promoting flexibility, meaningful work, and advisory opportunities. Together, these efforts ensure the profession is both attractive and accessible.

Practical Steps for Associations

While Michigan associations are already leading, any association can accelerate impact by:

1. Publishing a competency map for a high-demand role and aligning learning assets.
2. Launching a micro-credential that stacks toward certification or licensure.
3. Establishing an employer advisory council for real-time program feedback.
4. Piloting inclusive on-ramps, such as scholarship-backed cohorts for career changers.
5. Reporting outcomes—such as credential value or equity of access—beyond attendance.

Measuring What Matters

Associations are increasingly rigorous about measuring impact. Key metrics include:

- **Time-to-competence** – how quickly new hires reach productivity benchmarks.
- **Credential value** – wage gains, promotion rates, or retention outcomes.
- **Employer satisfaction** – post-training performance indicators.
- **Equity of access** – participation and completion rates by region and demographic.
- **Safety and compliance outcomes** – regulatory results, incident reductions, quality scores.

Looking Forward

Michigan's workforce challenges—higher unemployment, uneven participation, racial disparities, and digital skill shortages—require coordinated solutions. Associations are trusted partners uniquely positioned to deliver programs that are scalable, inclusive, and employer-validated.

By aligning with state priorities, leveraging convening power, and spotlighting practical pathways, Michigan associations are ensuring the state's workforce is not only ready for today but prepared for tomorrow.



Meet Donna

DONNA OSER, CAE, is President & CEO of the Michigan Society of Association Executives. She is a frequent author and speaker on association strategy, leadership, and professional development, and contributed the Organizational Strategy chapter to Professional Practices in Association Management.

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