NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE

Elevating & advancing local business.

2026 Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance Candidate Questionnaire

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1. **Purpose and Responsibility**

   Why are you seeking this office, and how would you define the responsibility of the office to the people of northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula?

   The people of northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula deserve a Senator that is working to make their lives easier by removing healthcare barriers, making sure all kids are receiving a world class and fully funded education, and centering the air, land and water that keeps our community healthy, fed and provides jobs today and tomorrow. I am seeking this office because I believe that we need to change the status quo and recognize that cost of living gaps are not going to be filled by the playbook of cutting taxes, but by truly investing in our community infrastructure and people. This is also important as this district faces increasing natural disasters and livelihood threats, and we need to have the systems to help people prepare and recover.

   I have a background in engineering, education and public service, and I know I can get a lot done to meet the needs of my community. I have a responsibility to every person in the district to listen, to find solutions together, and to not only look at what works today, but to help us plan for a strong future together.

2. **Jobs, Investment, and Competitiveness**

What specific policies would you support or develop if elected, to ensure northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula can compete for jobs, investment, infrastructure, and other state and federal resources?

I have heard from local communities that they would like grant-writing help to win more funds, and so I think this could be an area to look at growing. We need to work to make sure that the Michigan Infrastructure Office (MIO) Technical Assistance Center (TAC) works with our communities to secure federal grants for infrastructure development. This might mean creating a dedicated role to help rural communities and to reach out to and prioritize communities that have not received this funding within the last decade. A dedicated grant team could also work with local bodies to utilize the mifundinghub.org and help secure grants for the area. Northern Michigan needs dedicated capacity so small communities are not competing against Grand Rapids, Detroit, Lansing or Ann Arbor.

I would like to see a dedicated Rural Match Fund. Many federal and state grants require local matching dollars, and this punishes communities with small tax bases and limited staff. A rural match fund would help Northern Michigan say yes to water, sewer, road, broadband, housing, childcare, transportation infrastructure and energy grants when opportunities arise.

We need to also build workforce housing because our communities are struggling to compete for workers and investment when teachers, nurses, tradespeople, hospitality workers and young families cannot afford to live near their jobs. I would like to expand on the models that are already working in our communities, including gap financing, brownfield tools, land-bank support, downtown upper floor redevelopment, tax increase deferment on lower and mid-income development, and public-private partnerships that get housing built. I am also in favor of helping communities build accessory dwelling units that utilize current infrastructure to build middle-income and multi-family housing.

Childcare is also economic infrastructure, as shortages keep parents out of the workforce and make it harder for employers to hire. Policies to address this may also include infrastructure development and grants to help providers expand access or start services.

We also need a rural infrastructure reliability program that has dedicated funding for roads, bridges, culverts, septic replacement, wastewater treatment, stormwater, shoreline resilience and energy reliability. Small communities should not have to wait for a failure and crisis to receive help, and preventative upgrades need to be prioritized.

Finally, we need to finish universal high-speed internet and cellular coverage, because broadband is not optional infrastructure but a necessity. Federal dollars exist for this like USDA Community Connect Program, but Michigan also needs to provide application support, last-mile buildout support, and accountability for providers receiving public dollars.

3. **Housing and Regional Partnerships**
   NMCA's policy framework calls for housing solutions and regional partnerships to address the region's critical housing shortage. What policies or ideas do you have in which you can partner with the Alliance to make a positive impact?

   I'm an advocate for proven programs that build new housing and redevelop underutilized or vacant properties. Public-private partnerships are a path forward that we see working in Leelanau and Grand Traverse Counties. Local nonprofits, developers, and businesses work together to secure funding and resources to build mixed-use developments that include affordable housing.

   I also think that the Alliance can help push for expanded use of mortgage credit certificates and other state/federal programs to lower barriers for affordable housing. It would also be great to bring businesses into knowledge on how to help employees access these programs.

   We also need to have expanded programs locally that build more workforce housing, and methods to treat affordable housing as infrastructure that is not bought and sold as secondary homes and short term rentals.

4. **Workforce Development and Talent Attraction**
   What are your views on programs such as Going PRO, Michigan Reconnect, and talent attraction programs? What would you do to help attract, retain, train, and grow the workforce needed by northern Michigan and Upper Peninsula employers?

   Going PRO, Michigan Reconnect and Pure Michigan Talent Connect are great programs but they are underutilized. Going PRO helps employers train new and existing workers for demonstrated skill needs, while Michigan Reconnect gives adults a tuition-free pathway to community or Tribal college credentials. These programs should be consistently funded, easier for small rural employers and working adults to navigate, and aligned with credentials that workers can carry with them throughout their careers.

   I would support regional partnerships among employers, unions, Michigan Works!, schools, community and Tribal colleges, and local governments to expand apprenticeships, paid internships, and training in fields such as healthcare, construction, advanced manufacturing, education, energy, forestry, tourism, and the skilled trades.

   I've also had many workers and employers worry about THC testing keeping qualified workers out of certain jobs. I would push for THC testing to be on par with other

legalized substances such as tobacco and alcohol, and move to tests that are about workers being sober while working rather than never consuming.

We also need additional infrastructure for workers, including good roads, broadband, healthcare nearby; we also need childcare and transportation assistance for those at and below 200% of the poverty line. We need to have housing units built to meet the growing housing demand, and keep a percentage of housing as worker-affordable housing.

Finally, I would like to see more jobs have accelerated promotion tracks and higher step increases, particularly for secondary career workers. For instance, in education, teacher compensation is determined by step for year of experience and lane for educational level, but there should be further step and lane accelerated advancement for those entering education after other professional experience and for those that show exceptional skill. It is also important for public employees to get to the top of pay scales faster as the starting rungs have not kept up with cost of living in many areas.

5. **Childcare Access**
   Please describe your view of the need for childcare in the region, and what would you do to enhance access to this resource?

   Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula need more affordable and reliable childcare. This shortage makes it harder for parents to work and for employers to hire enough people. Families often face long waitlists, high costs, and limited care for infants.

   I would support more childcare subsidies for working families. I would also support better pay and training for childcare workers. Grants, affordable loans, and technical help should be available to people who want to open or expand childcare centers.

   We should also support flexible childcare options. These could include childcare sharing, neighborhood pods, and employer supported care. Schools and community centers could also help provide safe places for childcare programs.

   Working families also need care when school is not in session. I would support more funding for summer camps, after school programs, and school break care. Grants could help cover tuition, meals, and transportation.

   Childcare is an important part of a strong economy. Better access would help parents stay in the workforce and help children thrive. It would also make it easier for families to remain in Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

6. **Education Outcomes and Funding**
   What do you believe is the best action you could take to support growth in measurable outcomes for k-12 students in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula? How well is Michigan's funding of our higher education systems working, and would you make any changes to the way we fund education in this state?

The most important action I could take as a State Senator is to make sure schools have stable funding that reflects the real cost of educating each student. Michigan recently increased basic funding to $10,050 per student and added support for literacy, career education, rural schools, and students who need extra help. I would protect and expand these investments and create more competitive grants for rural districts facing high transportation costs, staff shortages, and limited access to advanced courses.

Funding must also be tied to practices that improve results. I would support grants for proven science of reading and math instruction, teacher training, tutoring, and regular progress checks. Schools should also receive resources to educate parents about learning at home and responsible technology use. Michigan recently required districts to limit phones during instructional time, and I would help schools put those policies into practice while supporting clear guidance on safe and honest use of artificial intelligence.

We also have schools paying for ed-tech that uses AI that still hallucinates sources and information. We should push to ban public funding for resources that have errors, in a 3 strikes out way that requires companies to refund costs for bad resources. Also, any government contracts for ed-tech should ensure that resources are transparent about AI use in information sourcing and image generation. We will want a way for this to be tracked and enforced.

Students also need skills that prepare them for modern life. I would expand career education, dual enrollment, skilled trades programs, and instruction in communication and problem solving. These opportunities should be available in small rural districts, not only in larger or wealthier communities.

Michigan has made college and career training more affordable through Michigan Reconnect, the Michigan Achievement Scholarship, and the Community College Guarantee. I would continue those programs while increasing support for community colleges and regional universities that serve rural students. Our funding system should close differences between districts and regions so that every student has a fair chance to succeed.

7. **Regulatory Climate and Small Business Growth**
What regulations, permitting processes, taxes, mandates, or compliance burdens do you believe most limit small business growth in our region? What would you do to make our state's regulatory environment more predictable?

Small businesses often feel that the greatest burden is not one specific rule or tax, but the time and uncertainty created by dealing with several agencies, unclear instructions, and long permit delays. This is especially difficult in Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, where small businesses have fewer staff members and less access to attorneys or compliance experts. Regional business leaders have called for faster licensing, simpler processes, and policies that reflect rural conditions. No one likes bureaucracy, but it also has to be balanced to ensure that rules and laws are followed. As a millennial, I think many systems need to be online, with auto-entry, instant review, with help buttons for correct examples and access to instant chat help for questions.

As a State Senator, I would support a single state office that helps businesses identify every permit they need and guides applications through each agency. I would also require agencies to publish clear requirements, expected costs, and reasonable decision timelines.

I do not believe predictable regulation means eliminating protections for workers, consumers, or our environment. It means writing rules that are understandable and enforcing them fairly. Small businesses that are trying to comply should receive technical help before punishment, especially when a violation is minor and can be corrected. Michigan already offers some free environmental compliance assistance, and I would expand that approach across state government.

I would also examine grant programs that require small businesses to spend the full cost of a project before receiving reimbursement. Programs such as Match on Main can provide valuable support, but the reimbursement model may shut out businesses that do not have enough cash or credit to pay first. I would support payments made as work is completed, with strong oversight to protect taxpayers.

My goal would be a system where businesses know the rules, receive timely answers, and can plan with confidence. We can protect Michigan's people and natural resources without making responsible small business owners spend months trying to understand what government expects from them. Also, we need better online portals and interfaces.

8. Affordability and Economic Vitality

What meaningful changes do you believe would help advance Michigan's economic vitality by making this state a more affordable place to live, work, and do business?

The most important step Michigan can take for both workers and businesses is to pass MI Care. Health insurance costs make it harder for families to afford daily life and harder for small businesses to hire and retain employees. A public health care system would reduce that burden, improve access to care, and allow people to change jobs or start businesses without fear of losing coverage. Preventative care would also help more people stay in the workforce.

Second, Michigan should invest more in attainable housing. Traverse City and Sault Ste. Marie both need homes that local workers can afford, while rural communities need grants for housing construction, rehabilitation, and infrastructure. State support should help communities build housing near jobs without forcing local governments to carry the full cost.

Finally, we need to build out infrastructure so that businesses can rely on good transportation, safe roads, modern sewage systems, dependable broadband, and affordable energy. These investments are especially important in rural communities, where aging systems and long distances can limit growth. Strong infrastructure helps existing businesses expand, attracts new investment, and improves daily life for workers and families.