

CEC 2026

NEWAYGO & FREMONT, MI

2026 STATEWIDE CONFERENCE

Breakout Session Details



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

MSU Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.



Thursday, May 28th 1:30 to 2:30pm Breakout Sessions

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|--|
| <p>The Dragon: From Concept to Construction and Beyond</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ryan Coffey Hoag, MSU Extension</i> • <i>Chris Wren, Newaygo County</i> • <i>Martin Hall</i> | <p>This session will include a panel discussion on the creation of the Dragon Trail and how this asset has become a rural, place-based economic driver in our community.</p> | <p>The Sportsman Bar (27 W State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>MSU Extension Tourism Resources for Entrepreneurial Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Garrett Zeigler, MSU Extension</i> | <p>Rural communities often sit on untapped tourism potential, hampered by a lack of awareness, organization, capacity, and even external perspectives. Realizing this potential requires both external perspective and strong internal alignment. To bridge this gap, Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) offers First Impressions Tourism (FIT) and the Rural Tourism Assessment (RTA). Their programs help communities identify tourism assets, gather meaningful feedback from first-time visitors, and guide communities in developing strategic plans that support tourism and economic vitality.</p> | <p>The Stream - Lecture Room (1 State Road, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>SCORE & SBDC West Michigan Regional Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Martha Gabrielse, SCORE - Muskegon Chapter</i> • <i>Marie Elliott, Small Business Development Center</i> | <p>This session will provide an overview of the SCORE and SBDC organizations and the services offered to small businesses, with a focus on those most requested in Newaygo, Ottawa, Muskegon, Lake, and Oceana counties. It will incorporate local case stories and highlight how we collaborate with local organizations.</p> | <p>37 North (27 W State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Building Small Town and Rural Capacity with Fellows and Interns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Mallory Meston & Travis Garvey, Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity</i> | <p>Fellows and interns bring opportunities for small towns and rural organizations to build capacity and with a bit of forethought, can be transformative for the hosting communities and the interns. Hear from two Office of Rural Prosperity interns and fellows who are participating in different programs and are working with communities across the state and learn about structuring an intern experience that maximizes impact for all involved.</p> | <p>Heavenflow Coffee (41 W State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Understanding Michigan's Agricultural Impact: How It Drives Your Local Economies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Annika Gacnik, West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission</i> <i>Clarence Rudat, MSU Product Center</i> | <p>West Michigan's agricultural sector is a powerful economic engine—driving jobs, innovation, and emerging markets across the region. This workshop translates insights from the West Michigan Agriculture Impact Analysis into practical opportunities for entrepreneurs and community leaders. Participants will explore key trends, regional strengths, value-added product potential, and supply-chain gaps ripe for innovation. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of how agriculture can fuel local entrepreneurship, diversify rural economies, and strengthen community resilience.</p> | <p>Newaygo City Hall (28 State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |

Thursday, May 28th 3:00 to 4:00pm Breakout Sessions

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Summer Camps-An Untapped Community Development Resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Scott Lakin & Whitney Sparks, Camp Newaygo</i> | <p>Camp Newaygo has been rooted in the community for 100 years. The organization's approach to being the community's camp is a model for how camps can be a community resource rather than isolated facilities in the woods. In addition to being part of local nonprofit TrueNorth Community Services, explore Camp Newaygo's approach to local partnerships, community events, support of local businesses, year-round operations, unrelated business income, and more!</p> | <p>The Stream - Classroom (1 State Road, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>REMAX and Dragon Adventures Base Camp</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mark Deering</i> | <p>Mark is an active energized entrepreneur who loves helping folks with real estate. With his passion for adventure he has built businesses that attracts similar adventurers and does business with them! and now has a Adventure resort!</p> | <p>Newaygo City Hall (28 State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Short-Term Rental (STR) Policy Options for Local Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tyler Augst, MSU Extension</i> | <p>This session will begin by briefly exploring trends and research related to STRs as well as where local communities can find data to examine their own local situation. This will be followed by an overview of policy approaches, regulatory tools, enforcement, and key STR court cases. We'll end with a fun tour of example STR ordinances from around the state.</p> | <p>The Stream - Lecture Room (1 State Road, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Empowering the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kathy Jamieson, MSU Extension</i> | <p>Want to attract and retain young talent in your community? Discover strategies to engage youth in entrepreneurship as a career path. Learn how to build an entrepreneurial mindset through hands-on programs, innovative curricula, and real-world business creation experiences. Gain practical resources and connect with others committed to growing future entrepreneurs. Join us to explore how fostering youth entrepreneurship can transform communities and drive economic growth.</p> | <p>Heritage Museum of Newaygo County (12 Quarterline St, Newaygo)</p> |

Thursday, May 28th 4:30 to 5:30pm Breakout Sessions

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
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| <p>Cultivating Leadership in Rural Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tim Liberty, The Baldwin Group</i> | <p>This session will highlight the local Chamber's Leadership Academy. Why we started it, how we conduct it, and the benefits that we have seen.</p> | <p>Newaygo City Hall (28 State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Building History for the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Steven Radtke & Catherine Gage, Heritage Museum of Newaygo County</i> | <p>The project will be explained from concept to opening, highlighting innovations in layout and usage, reuse of materials, and cohesion of branding to the mission</p> | <p>Newaygo City Hall (28 State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Building the Builders: Supporting Emerging Real Estate Entrepreneurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tavis Alden & Jess Solis, SME</i> | <p>Emerging real estate developers are essential to achieving community development goals, but they face unique challenges navigating their early projects. This session explores critical considerations new developers must address...from financing and feasibility to local regulations. Furthermore, we'll discuss how communities can create supportive ecosystems that align entrepreneurial success with local vision. Learn practical strategies to build developer capacity, reduce barriers, and foster partnerships that transform community development plans into reality.</p> | <p>The Stream - Lecture Room (1 State Road, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Beyond Ready: How 4-H Builds Skills for Work and Life in Michigan Youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rachel Puckett & Jenni Payne, MSU Extension</i> | <p>4-H programs across Michigan's 83 counties create a safe and supportive space for young people ages 5 to 19 to explore their sparks. From cattle to robots to poultry to sewing, youth build self-confidence, problem-solving, and leadership skills via project-based experiential learning opportunities. Join us to learn how 4-H is not just building tomorrow's entrepreneurs, it is providing an encouraging space for youth to flex their entrepreneurial skills today.</p> | <p>The Stream - Classroom (1 State Road, Newaygo)</p> |
| <p>Agritourism: Navigating the Intersection of RTF/GAAMPs and Local Building and Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ryan Coffey Hoag</i> | <p>Overview of the economic value and changing trends of agritourism in the agricultural sector and challenges agritourism operations must address when siting and expanding, particularly when utilizing Right to Farm/GAAMPs for farm protection and obtaining local building and zoning approval, when necessary.</p> | <p>Newaygo Brewing (19 State Rd, Newaygo)</p> |

Friday, May 29th 8:45 to 9:30am Breakout Sessions

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
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| <p>Oceana County: Low Population Communities... Huge Impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Curtis Burdette, Oceana County Economic Alliance</i> | <p>This session will highlight successes in Oceana County in community development with housing and placemaking as well as economic development with successes for entrepreneurs and major employers</p> | <p>Sinfully Sweet Bakery (5 W. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>From Vacant to Alive: How Unassuming Places Become Entrepreneurial Engines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Hannah Greening, Fancy Real Estate and Rhize Urban Strategy</i> | <p>Vacancy isn't failure—it's potential waiting for the right conditions. This session shares practical lessons from underused buildings, overlooked corridors, and unassuming small towns that sparked real entrepreneurial momentum. Through honest stories of success and missteps, attendees will learn how small-scale activation, tenant curation, and trust-driven strategy can turn quiet places into engines of local business growth—without waiting for perfect timing or big deals.</p> | <p>Fremont Public Library (104 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>Growing Minds & Cultivating Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Vittoria Jimerson & Jason Overmyer, Welcome Home Organization, Gems of Jackson Childcare & Education Center</i> | <p>This session will outline the Community Development Efforts and Connections taking place in Jackson County and four non-profit organizations receiving a 2 million dollar grant from LEO to create lasting change in our community.</p> | <p>The Arts Place (13 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>From Vacant to Vibrant: Key Steps to Transform Empty Spaces into Vital Ventures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Meredith Gremel, Pure Markette - Village of Baldwin DDA</i> | <p>With a little creativity and effort, vacant premises can be transformed into thriving businesses, bringing new life and vitality to an area. During this interactive presentation, we will build the framework for success, unpacking obstacles and opportunities related to site and need assessment, funding, staffing, partnerships, promotions, and community impact. Using the example of turning a vacant lot into a vibrant farmers/makers market, participants will develop a roadmap for their respective community impact projects.</p> | <p>City of Fremont Court Room (101 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|--|
| <p>From Kitchen to Community: How Stakeholders Can Foster a Thriving Local Food Ecosystem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Diane Longanbach & Laura Wood-Romito, MSU Extension</i> | <p>This seminar explores practical strategies that local chambers of commerce, municipal governments, and community-based NGOs can use to cultivate a thriving food-business ecosystem. Speakers from the University who serve as statewide business counselors will share insights drawn from their on-the-ground work with emerging and established food entrepreneurs. Attendees will learn how to streamline support services, strengthen partnerships, and remove barriers that commonly impede small food enterprises. The session is designed to spark collaboration and equip community leaders with actionable tools to nurture sustainable, locally rooted food businesses.</p> | <p>Fremont Chamber Office (7 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |

Friday, May 29th 9:45 to 10:30am Breakout Sessions

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Building Small Town and Rural Capacity with Fellows and Interns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Mallory Meston & Travis Garvey, Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity</i> | <p>Fellows and interns bring opportunities for small towns and rural organizations to build capacity and with a bit of forethought, can be transformative for the hosting communities and the interns. Hear from two Office of Rural Prosperity interns and fellows who are participating in different programs and are working with communities across the state and learn about structuring an intern experience that maximizes impact for all involved.</p> | <p>Sinfully Sweet Bakery (5 W. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>Creating Community Strength While Growing Your Small Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Mary Galvanek & Emily Miller with Farm to Home, Reed City Farmers Market, Cadillac Farmers Market, and Forest and Farm</i> | <p>This session explores how both our farmers markets, Forest and Farm, and our vegetable delivery program, Farm to Home, were all created from community collaboration- and continue to thrive because of it. We'll discuss how partnering with everyone from local families and nonprofits to Corewell Health and corporate sponsors creates a sustainable model that strengthens community impact while fueling small-business growth. Participants will learn how collaborative relationships can uplift both your mission and your business.</p> | <p>Terry Wantz Center (29 W Main St, Fremont)</p> |

| SESSION TITLE & SPEAKERS | SESSION DETAILS | SESSION LOCATION |
|---|---|--|
| <p>How Rural Communities Can Lead Michigan's Next Wave of Tech-Driven Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>John Bedz, Automation Alley</i> | <p>Rural communities can lead Michigan's next wave of tech-driven growth. Automation Alley's John Bedz, Program Manager – New Tech and Partnerships, will share practical strategies for helping entrepreneurs and small manufacturers adopt accessible digital tools like automation and AI. Based on lessons learned statewide, this session outlines how to build a tech-forward ecosystem with limited resources and highlights programs – like Integr8, Project DIAMOnD, trade assistance and soft-landing support – that rural businesses can tap into now.</p> | <p>The Arts Place (13 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>Building a Local Hub for Food, Business, and Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Allison Hinton, Mill Street Market</i> | <p>Mill Street Market started as a food hub and has grown into a community-driven project in Hastings, MI, bringing together a Farm Stop Market and Café, an Incubator Kitchen and Aggregation Space, and a Child Development Center. These spaces create a lively community hub that connects farmers, entrepreneurs, and families, expands access to healthy food, fosters local business growth, and energizes downtown Hastings as a center for opportunity and connection.</p> | <p>Fremont Public Library (104 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |
| <p>Portrait of a Graduate: A Countywide Vision for Workforce-Ready Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Dr. Blake J. Prewitt, Newaygo County RESA</i> | <p>Learn how Newaygo County aligned five school districts, the Career Tech Center, and local employers to create a shared Portrait of a Graduate. This session highlights the community-driven process, key competencies identified by business partners, and how the framework is shaping instruction and workforce partnerships. Attendees will gain practical steps for launching similar efforts that strengthen local talent pipelines and community collaboration.</p> | <p>Fremont Chamber Office (7 E. Main St., Fremont)</p> |

