



eCities 2024 Summary

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eCities is an annual research study that examines community-level factors that foster entrepreneurship and small business development. The focus is on entrepreneurship and small business growth because of their importance to the expansion and diversification of regional economies and job creation. The primary purpose of eCities is to understand the impact of the strategies and success stories of Michigan communities across the state. The data collected not only provides a means for benchmarking performance, but it also allows communities to learn from the qualities and efforts of their neighboring communities.

Background

Across the country, economic development activities are carried out by various entities, including state agencies, regional associations, and counties. While these broader organizations engage in promoting economic development in Michigan, similar activities are also undertaken by many townships, cities, and villages. Given this, the eCities project uses the community as the unit of measurement, and not a county or metropolitan area, as other studies have used.

The eCities project seeks to provide benchmarking tools and overview reports for participating communities and has incorporated new ways to learn from the success stories of local communities across the state. While there is no single solution for every community, the success stories allow communities to understand strategies that can be tailored to local resources and communities. Helping local communities, who often have the most impact on small and entrepreneurial firms, provides an opportunity to improve the environment for entrepreneurialism throughout the state. Since its inception in 2007, eCities has grown from 14 to over 260 eligible communities and more than 300 communities invited to participate each year. As communities continue to demonstrate their interest in the annual project, the eCities team is implementing new ways to benchmark community progress and offer more comprehensive analysis to participating communities.

Data Sources

In 2024, five-year's worth of publicly available data on communities was collected by the eCities team to analyze trends surrounding business and economic cycles. Such data demonstrates growth, investments, and the cost of doing business within the communities.

More specifically, eCities examined eleven publicly available data points relating to community growth and investment metrics that impact the business community. Data was collected on 277 Michigan communities from 54 of the 83 counties in the state. Communities were chosen based on population, geography, and relative size within counties.

Property Values (7 data points): Examines the changes in the amount of real commercial property, real industrial property, real total property, personal commercial property, personal industrial property, total personal property, and overall total property

Property Taxes (1 data point): Examines the changes in the average non-homestead tax rate

Governmental Assets (3 data points): Examines the changes in non-depreciated, depreciated, and total governmental assets

In addition to the quantitative data collection and analysis, all communities were invited to respond to a short-answer survey regarding business climate improvement efforts and small business support. More specifically, community leaders were asked to respond to the following statements:

1. Please describe how your local government has recently used artificial intelligence (AI) to promote economic development in your community.
2. In comparison to other states, Michigan is currently lagging in population growth in part due to the mobility of 20–34-year-olds and their preference to live elsewhere. Please describe a policy created and/or action taken by your local government to attract and/or retain young talent in your community.
3. Please share one high quality photograph of your community taken within the past 2 years and explain how the image portrays your community as a great place for entrepreneurs and/or small business.

The responses were evaluated by a panel of reviewers to determine the 2024 Honored Communities. The communities recognized as 2024 Honored Communities include the cities of Battle Creek, Mt. Pleasant, Romulus, Sault Ste. Marie, and Tecumseh.

2024 Five-Star and Four-Star Communities

182 communities were recognized as 5-star and 4-star communities. The 5-star and 4-star communities in the eCities project are part of a group of Michigan communities that have seen the strongest growth in business development over the past five years, while controlling the costs of doing business in town.

Five-Star Honored Communities

Ada Township	Georgetown Township	City of Niles
Allendale Township	Grand Blanc Township	Oakland Township
Alpine Township	City of Grand Haven	Oceola Township
Atlas Township	Grand Haven Township	Orion Township
Bangor Township	City of Grand Ledge	Paradise Township
Bay City	Green Oak Township	Park Township
City of Berkley	Hamburg Township	Pere Marquette Township
City of Big Rapids	Harrison Township	City of Pontiac
Blendon Township	City of Hazel Park	City of Reading
Brady Township	Highland Township	Richfield Township
City of Cadillac	Holly Township	City of Royal Oak
Caledonia Township	City of Houghton	Saugatuck Township
Cannon Township	City of Hudsonville	Scio Township
Cascade Township	Huron Township	Spring Lake Township
City of Cheboygan	City of Kalamazoo	City of St. Johns
Chesaning Township	Kalamazoo Township	Superior Township
City of Clawson	City of Lansing	Sylvan Township
Clinton Township	Lawrence Township	Texas Township
Commerce Township	Leighton Township	Thomas Township
Davison Township	Lyon Township	Traverse City
City of Detroit	Macomb Township	Tyrone Township
DeWitt Township	City of Madison Heights	Union Township
East Bay Township	Manchester Township	Vassar Township
City of Eastpointe	City of Marshall	City of Walker
Elmwood Township	City of Melvindale	City of Walled Lake
City of Farmington	Meridian Township	Washington Township
City of Farmington Hills	Mount Morris Township	West Bloomfield Township
Fenton Township	City of Muskegon	City of Williamston
City of Ferndale	City of New Baltimore	City of Wixom
Garfield Township		City of Wyoming

Four-Star Honored Communities

City of Adrian	Gaines Township	City of Oak Park
City of Alma	Genoa Township	Oxford Township
City of Alpena	City of Grand Blanc	City of Perry
Ann Arbor Township	City of Grand Rapids	Plainfield Township
Antwerp Township	Grand Rapids Township	City of Port Huron
Armada Township	City of Greenville	City of Rochester
Bath Charter Township	City of Grosse Pointe	City of Rochester Hills
Benton Township	City of Grosse Pointe Park	City of Rockford
City of Benton Harbor	City of Hamtramck	City of Roseville
City of Birmingham	City of Hastings	City of Saginaw
Blackman Township	City of Holland	Saginaw Township
Bridgeport Township	Holland Township	Salem Township
Brighton Township	City of Howell	Shelby Township
City of Brighton	Imlay City	Somerset Township
City of Burton	City of Kentwood	City of South Lyon
Byron Township	Kochville Township	Springfield Township
Canton Township	Lincoln Township	City of St. Clair
City of Center Line	City of Litchfield	St. Joseph Township
City of Charlotte	Marine City	City of Sterling Heights
City of Chelsea	City of Marysville	City of Sturgis
Chesterfield Township	City of Menominee	City of Swartz Creek
Comstock Township	City of Milan	City of Three Rivers
City of Dearborn Heights	Monroe Township	City of Troy
Delhi Township	City of Mount Clemens	City of Utica
Delta Township	Muskegon Township	Van Buren Township
City of Eaton Rapids	City of Muskegon Heights	City of Warren
City of Fenton	Niles Township	Waterford Township
City of Flint	Northville Township	City of Wyandotte
City of Frankenmuth	City of Norton Shores	Ypsilanti Township
City of Fraser	City of Novi	City of Zeeland

Highlights

This year, the 277 eligible communities from 54 counties span the state of Michigan and are home to 71% of its population. Over the five-year period of 2019-2023, these communities increased their capital assets by an average of 3.71% per year by investments such as new buildings, roads and bike paths, and library renovations. Further, these places are home to 86% of Michigan's real commercial property and have 64% of the state's total property value.

In 2024, eCities recognized 182 municipalities as four- and five-star communities. These communities vary in size, with some being the most populated places in the state, to others being home to just over 2,000 residents. From 2019-2023, these communities were able to grow property values (up an average of 7.59%) and capital assets (up an average of 6.07%), while only increasing taxes by .03% on average.

Lastly, five communities were recognized as 2024 eCities Honored Communities for their strategies and efforts to support small businesses and economic development within their communities. The 2024 eCities Honored Communities include the cities of Battle Creek, Mt. Pleasant, Romulus, Sault Ste. Marie, and Tecumseh.

Conclusion

eCities 2024 marked 17 years of helping communities to improve the state's entrepreneurial climate by collecting and sharing the strategies and successes of Michigan municipalities and providing an understanding of what strategies are successful in engaging the business community. The eCities project highlights how local governments from across Michigan are growing their communities and supporting businesses. As a university, the University of Michigan-Dearborn wants to share the successes and educate about the best practices that can be used by other communities in the state. As the nature of economic development evolves, eCities is a tool to help local governments demonstrate their role in the changing economy. These governments are supporting unique and innovative efforts locally, while collaborating regionally to help Michigan businesses compete in an ever-changing business climate.

Much like the entrepreneurs whom they covet, communities need to understand that strategies cannot be copied and applied without consideration. Communities need to recognize and match their resources to best meet the needs of their businesses if they are to encourage growth and attract entrepreneurial investment.

To learn more about eCities or iLABS, please contact kporembi@umich.edu or visit the [eCities website](#).