



FIRST UP OVERVIEW

2026 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST BELIEVES THE ULTIMATE CATALYST FOR OUR REGION'S GROWTH AND PROSPERITY IS A ROBUST TALENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY. THAT'S WHY WE'RE EXCITED TO HOST **FIRST UP**, OUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DESIGNED TO EMPOWER EMERGING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS LIKE YOU.

FIRST UP WAS DESIGNED FOR EARLY-CAREER PROFESSIONALS WITH FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE OR LESS. IDEAL CANDIDATES ARE THOSE WHO ARE EAGER TO APPROACH THEIR PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT WITH INTENTIONALITY AND FULL SUPPORT FROM THEIR LEADERS.

POWERED BY



SPONSORED BY



Nonprofit corporations and independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

SCAN THE QR CODE TO APPLY



APPLICATION

APPLY AT WWW.SOUTHWESTMICHIGANFIRST.COM/EVENTS/FIRST-UP BY FEBRUARY 27, 2026. EARLY SUBMISSION IS ENCOURAGED AS APPLICATIONS ARE CONSIDERED ON A ROLLING BASIS.

PROGRAM CONTACT

RACHAEL TIESNGA, DIRECTOR | SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST
E: RTIESNGA@SOUTHWESTMICHIGANFIRST.COM | P: 269.553.9588

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

FIRST UP IS A COHORT-BASED PROGRAM MADE UP OF DIVERSE AND ENGAGED PROFESSIONALS THAT REPRESENT A VARIETY OF INDUSTRIES IN THE SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN REGION. THE FOUR SESSIONS WILL HELP YOU UNCOVER YOUR UNIQUE LEADERSHIP STYLE, SET GOALS FOR FUTURE GROWTH, CULTIVATE A MINDSET OF PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE, AND COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE IN THE WORKPLACE.

FIRST UP WILL EQUIP PARTICIPANTS WITH SKILLS IN THESE THREE AREAS:

GUTS:

Strategies to increase self awareness, build professional resilience and tackle the “imposter syndrome.”

GRIT:

Tools to navigate company dynamics, design a plan for professional development and develop a personal branding strategy.

GO-TOS:

Best practices of experienced leaders and the resources available in our community for the help you need

PARTICIPANTS WILL LEARN HOW TO:

- **MASTER THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF SELF-LEADERSHIP**
- **CRAFT SMART GOALS THAT ARE ALIGNED WITH YOUR PERSONAL AND COMPANY OBJECTIVES**
- **EMBRACE AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**
- **COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AT ALL LEVELS FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES**
- **BUILD A ROBUST PROFESSIONAL NETWORK**
- **NAVIGATE WORKPLACE DYNAMICS AND CULTURAL NUANCES**
- **CULTIVATE RESILIENCE AND MANAGE STRESS AMIDST CHALLENGES**
- **COLLABORATE WITHIN DIVERSE TEAMS, BRIDGING GENERATIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC GAPS, AND MORE**

2026 FIRST UP SCHEDULE

APRIL						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

SESSION 1: LEADING WHERE YOU ARE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2026 | 9 A.M. TO 12 NOON

- THE FIVE STAGES OF A CAREER AND THE PROFESSIONAL CORE COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR SUCCESS
- ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS, MINDSETS, AND HABITS
- HOW TO IDENTIFY WHAT LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR ROLE AND PRESENT YOURSELF AS THE LEADER YOU ASPIRE TO BE
- YOUR PROFESSIONAL BRAND AND REPUTATION

SESSION 2: SETTING GOALS FOR GROWTH

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2026 | 9 A.M. TO 12 NOON

- WHAT SMART GOALS ARE AND HOW TO SET THEM
- HOW TO CHART THE COURSE OF YOUR CAREER AND SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS
- STRATEGIES TO ALIGN YOUR TIME AND ACTIONS WITH YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS TO MAKE MEANINGFUL PROGRESS

MAY						
				1	2	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

SESSION 3: CULTIVATING PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2026 | 9 A.M. TO 12 NOON

- HOW TO IDENTIFY KEY STRESS INDICATORS AND CULTIVATE HABITS FOR HEALTHY STRESS MANAGEMENT
- PUT A GROWTH MINDSET INTO PRACTICE
- TOOLS TO NAVIGATE SETBACKS, FAILURE, CHANGE, AND THE UNKNOWN

SESSION 4: COMMUNICATING FOR SUCCESS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2026 | 9 A.M. TO 12 NOON

- THE CORE ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE
- BEST PRACTICES FOR POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE COMMUNICATION ON TEAMS
- HOW TO NAVIGATE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND MANAGE STRESS ALONG THE WAY
- WAYS TO TAKE YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE AND APPROACH INTO CONSIDERATION WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION/TEAM CULTURE

INVESTMENT: \$900 PER PERSON | \$750 FOR CHAMBER MEMBERS