



VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC ACTION
FRAMEWORK/DESTINY DRIVERS
2015-2020

Feb-2016

Koochiching County Area

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks to the Voyage Forward Stewards listed here that began meeting in September 2015 to take the results of the community engagement process and work by our national consultant team to prepare the mission, vision and destiny drivers outlined in this strategy framework. Their commitment and support have made this Call to Action conversation possible. Also, in the appendix please find a list of the Voyage Forward working teams and private, public sector and community representatives involved in various activities supporting Voyage Forward. We appreciate their efforts and engagement as well as all of the ideas and input provided by citizens throughout the Koochiching County area and Fort Frances.

Barb Fisher	Jenell Feller	Rob Davenport
Bill Maki	Jenny Herman	Scott Riley
Bob Anderson	Jerry Struss	Shane Talley
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Cynthia Jaksa	Judith Nelson	Sheila Demenge
Diane Briggs	Ken Anderson	Sherril Gautreaux
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Eric Johnson	Lynn Naeckel	Soren Olesen
Gail Rognerud	Michael Wellcome	Tammy Riley
Heather Rand	Nancy Imhoff	Travis Glowasky
Jackie Glowack	Nancy Rognerud	Ward Merrill
Jared Echternach	Pam Oveson	
Jean Evens	Paul Nevanen	

WHAT IS A STEWARD?

Stewards are ordinary people; people from all walks of life who care deeply about the community. Stewards are leaders who cross boundaries, take an integrated approach and build coalitions for action. They have 360-degree vision, recognizing the interdependencies between the economy, the environment and social equity. Stewards operate at the center of tough issues, not on the edges. They are risk takers. They are passionate and energetic. They are people of vision.

KOOCHICHING COUNTY AREA

VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK/DESTINY DRIVERS 2015-2020

VOYAGE FORWARD....A JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

PRELUDE

The paper machine closure and permanent dislocation of approximately 265 quality manufacturing/trades jobs at Boise Paper, a division of Packaging Corporation of America, is having a significant and profound social and economic impact on International Falls and surrounding Koochiching Area Community. This action on the heels of a similar major paper plant closure and over 450 jobs lost in neighboring Fort Frances over the preceding couple of year period, coupled with the sale of Boise to a new owner, Packaging Corporation of America, presented a major economic wakeup call and Call to Action. The city, county and local business community recognized the significance of these business decisions and it reminded community leaders of some of the past major dislocations that had occurred and how those changes affected the area over the past ten to twenty years. These actions coupled with an already stagnant economy and challenging demographic trends evident for more than a decade set the stage for an organized economic response similar to other areas facing dislocations and challenges within and outside of the Northland Region.

“Communities of varying sizes across the country are dealing with shifts in their driver industries and witnessing fundamental changes in their ability to sustain and promote economic activity. It is this back-drop of a changing economic landscape that makes this Economic Adjustment Strategy timely.”

Robert Hess
Executive Managing Director, Consulting
Newmark Grubb Knight Frank



AN ORGANIZED AREAWIDE RESPONSE

At this crossroads, city and county elected leaders called on the Governor, congressional and legislative leaders and other local and regional stakeholders who stepped up, found supporting resources and made a major economic investment in a strategic planning process and economic response initiative that was unprecedented in Koochiching County's history. This organized economic response was envisioned to address immediate needs of impacted workers and other affected businesses while initiating a strategic process to formulate a longer term economic adjustment and diversification strategy. The facilitated approach called for the community to be engaged, to touch and involve the entire county, and would call upon public and private stakeholders/volunteers as "stewards" to step up and join in the response effort. It was branded as "Voyage Forward...a Journey to Success" and communicated its intent, to define the longer term vision and values important to the area, to go through a process that was data driven, engaged community members and citizens, and sought outside professional expertise to objectively assess, evaluate and recommend a future course of action – strategy and tactics that are built on area strengths and national best practices for similar rural areas.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As part of this intensive public engagement process, Stewards identified community-wide organizations, both public and private, and called on individuals of all ages from across the county and asked four basic questions about what they value, what they don't want to see changed and what they would change if given the opportunity. The Stewards listened objectively and thoughtfully captured the opinions and information in a database that was later summarized and shared broadly.

The response was overwhelming. The Stewards received feedback from roughly 800 people who provided thousands of responses. People were engaged, passionate, and open about what they thought and felt about Koochiching County. The four question interview results provided a framework of information to conduct a more focused community-wide survey based on the emerging themes identified from the interview process. The survey was designed to verify and expand on the themes shared in the interviews. An online community survey with paper copies made available around the county was developed and advertised broadly. Over 900 respondents participated in the survey. To put this into perspective, the population of Koochiching County (over 18 years old) is 10,529. That is a response rate of almost 9% of that population. If we base the response rate on the number of households in Koochiching County (5,874), the percentage is close to 16%.



ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the locally driven public engagement process, our consultant team from Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, a world class economic and business development location consultant firm, completed a detailed economic assessment of the county and regional area which led to an extensive analysis and development of an economic adjustment strategy with over 120 recommendations. They shared an objective evaluation and prioritized list of key strategies, tactics and actions as a guide to transform the area's declining economy over the coming years.

The Voyage Forward process was launched and implemented, and this strategic framework highlights the shared vision, values and priority "Destiny Drivers" that came through this effort. A lot of work was done by hundreds of people that joined the teams, participated in sharing information with our consultants and worked with the process spending countless hours asking and documenting what the community values, what is important and why we need to align and work collaboratively, looked at the consultant findings and recommendations, and crafted a vision and priorities that make sense and will set the economic and community development pathways to support prosperity for future generations.

At the conclusion of the Economic Adjustment Strategy Report prepared by Newmark Grubb Knight Frank they shared the following perspective:

"Economic development is a marathon, not a sprint. We have provided Koochiching County with a very long list of recommendations that will require many months and, in some cases, many years to implement. Some of these recommendations are tactical and others are more strategic. In most cases, they will require political will, professionalism, and cooperation among all public (federal, state, county, and city), private, academic, and utility stakeholders to implement."

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN DRAFTED

This Vision, Mission and Strategic Action Framework were developed as a draft by the Economic Leadership Team and Voyage Forward Stewards, and will be shared at a county-wide Call to Action event to be held in February 2016. It will be finalized and endorsed by event participants and will be shared for adoption by our public, private and non-profit organizations as the initial road map, and will evolve and be updated as it's implemented in the coming months and years. This summary document includes the shared Vision and major Strategic Destiny Drivers/Goals



and supporting rationale, expected outcomes, key stakeholders, and measure of success to be championed by community leaders and organizations with ongoing communication, support and community involvement. The detailed actions and tactics will be developed and then implemented by the responsible Champions and their teams under the leadership of Voyage Forward. Please join us on this Journey to Success.

KOOCHICHING AREA MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Voyage Forward is to be the platform for growing a vibrant and thriving region through community and economic development.

KOOCHICHING AREA VISION STATEMENT

We are one community focused on the future, which values our citizens, environment and unique culture. We are open to all ideas and value the input from our citizens. We understand to improve; we must look to the future and invest in community and economic development.

KOOCHICHING AREA VISION AND VALUES

We are one community – the county, the cities, and the rural centers, with a shared focus on the common good, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship to build a vibrant community.

Our economy is diverse – built on tourism, retail and a solid manufacturing base. We always respect and treat each other with civility. What is good for one is good for all. We share in each other’s victories.

We value our history and learn from it yet are focused on the future. We understand that to prosper we must accept change. Our community embraces and welcomes new comers and what they offer. We understand what it takes to attract young workers and their families and will provide the framework for their success.

Our location is an asset. We are not the “end of the road.” We are the center of a thriving region with excellent educational, medical, professional and retail services and facilities. Entrances, downtowns and main corridors are attractive and reflect our pride in our area.

We recognize the value of being home to the only National Park in Minnesota and collaboratively promote the region’s cultural and recreational tourism opportunities and amenities as a major destination.

Borderland is a Regional and International Center with road, rail, and air travel. We are partners with our Canadian neighbors and family in Ft. Frances, and promote and leverage this mutual relationship.

Our citizens are our greatest asset. We believe inclusiveness, cooperation, and collaboration are necessary to leverage our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. Our elected officials, organizations,

and individual citizens provide leadership and are fully committed to our Journey to Success.

Our youth is our future. We value their input and build the necessary support system that will ensure their success. We take pride in both retaining and attracting youth back to our community and this rural life style.

The outdoors embodies the very fabric of our culture. We respect the environment and work to conserve it for future generations. We relish in the freedom to enjoy every facet of our region and share its bounty with everyone.

We are connected to the world. We have affordable, high-speed broadband throughout our community. Everyone in our community has the ability to access a high speed internet connection. It improves our lives and our business, education, health care, and civic institutions. It’s a future life line and competitive necessity in a shrinking global community.

We are a regional leader in economic development. We grow our own businesses and work to expand and diversify. We work with our businesses to understand what is needed for success. We invest in our people, infrastructure, and communities in a manner that supports quality of place, sustainable economic growth and our social responsibility for the less fortunate.

A thriving and stable economy depends on a skilled workforce. In the 21st century, technical skills and continuing education are keys to family sustaining jobs, careers and successful businesses. Our educational system are partners with local businesses to make sure that our residents have the skills and education necessary to fill quality, living wage jobs and grow strong businesses.

STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK – DESTINY DRIVERS/OUTCOME BASED GOALS

The following are ten major Destiny Drivers...outcome based goals and supporting information that are major priorities of Voyage Forward.

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|--|---|--|
| <p>Develop an organizational framework to lead, facilitate, communicate and sustain Voyage Forward</p> | <p>Develop an organizational framework to lead and facilitate implementation of key economic development strategies</p> | <p>Grow and diversify businesses and jobs in Koochiching County</p> |
| <p>Develop a skilled, trained and educated workforce that meets the needs of the area</p> | <p>Invest in and maintain high quality infrastructure that supports and is aligned with community and economic development needs and priorities</p> | <p>Position the Voyage Forward region as a quality tourist destination</p> |
| <p>Maximize cross-border opportunities in support of Voyage Forward goals</p> | <p>Create a uniformly attractive county and means to explore it</p> | <p>Create a quality of life environment which provides for a healthy and engaged community for residents in all phases of life</p> |
| <p>Diversify our population, business community, and job base by attracting and retaining people and their talents</p> | | |

DEVELOP AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO LEAD, FACILITATE, COMMUNICATE AND SUSTAIN VOYAGE FORWARD

This driver will set the stage on how we (Voyage Forward) will operate in the next five years. Key stakeholders will develop the framework describing Voyage Forward’s ongoing role and responsibilities and identify who will lead its efforts.

Clearly articulate our mission and vision.

Voyage Forward will stand on its own but not be disconnected from local government and institutions which will be necessary partners to achieve its vision and values.

Discussion of how Voyage Forward will be organized; who will lead, a board or Destiny Driver Champions.

The role will be to convene, communicate, prioritize Destiny Drivers and identify a process to secure, allocate and distribute necessary resources for Destiny Drivers (as needed).

Develop process to manage Destiny Drivers – when Destiny Drivers are complete (or can thrive on their own) – when a Destiny Driver is struggling or should be changed and how to help.


Develop process to identify and prioritize new Destiny Drivers.

OUTCOMES

- Clearly defined coordination, management and communications plan by March 31, 2016.
- Organizational structure for Voyage Forward by March 31, 2016.
- Communications and marketing plan – website, internal and external communication

MEASUREMENTS

- Defined organizational structure
- Communication Plan – external and internal
- Driver Management Plan

DRIVER CHAMPION	Co-Chairs of Long-Term Vision and Strategy Team
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	Voyage Forward Long Term Strategy Team members, Stewards, economic development agencies, governmental agencies, Chamber, College, ERT
REFERENCE INFO	

DEVELOP AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO LEAD AND FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The number one recommendation from the Economic Development Strategy was to develop a regional economic development partnership. The rationale for this partnership was to provide for one message, one entity responsible for all economic development activity in Koochiching County with broad government, business and citizen representation.

Recognizing the legislative constraints in developing an economic development partnership, the agreed upon framework will provide for broader public and private representation and participation from throughout the county while retaining the public development authorities and leveraging the significant state funding directed under statute to the Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA). The new framework should include and align the resources of KEDA, International Falls EDA, and, possibly, the Koochiching County Development Authority.

OUTCOMES

- Broader representation and input to the KEDA Board by March 31, 2016.
- Enhanced marketing plan, communications plan, and partnerships which support the one message, one entity theme by March 31, 2016

MEASUREMENTS

- Appropriate balance of citizen, business and government representation to ensure broader public and private input.
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

DRIVER CHAMPION	
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	KEDA, International Falls EDA, Long Term Vision, Strategy and Asset Team, Chamber, city representatives, and RRCC
REFERENCE INFO	<p>Newmark’s Economic Development Strategy: Number one recommendation to positively affect economic development initiatives within the region.</p> <p>Voyage Forward Survey: Less than 20% indicated satisfaction with collaborative economic development initiatives.</p>

GROW AND DIVERSIFY BUSINESSES AND JOBS IN KOOCHICHING COUNTY

Strongly noted in the Steward Survey, NGKF’s Four Questions, a key component to the NGKF Strategy Report, and an ongoing mission of the KEDA, job growth and diversification will be a priority driver for Koochiching County’s future.

Also noted in the NGKF Report - “80% of all economic growth in a community comes from its existing businesses & it costs 100 times more to recruit new businesses...”

A priority among a number of respondents to the Stewards Survey revolved around “Job creation, business retention, and entrepreneurial development.”

OUTCOMES

- Incorporate the target industries and companies identified in the Newmark Report with existing contacts and databases and develop an expanded communication/ marketing strategy to contact those with the highest potential for attraction to the County by (1st quarter 2016 & ongoing).
- Work with local businesses and entrepreneurs to develop locally grown business opportunities from the target industries identified in the Newmark Report by (Ongoing).
- By (2nd Quarter 2016), establish an ongoing Economic Gardening Program to support second stage businesses in Koochiching County that are profitable, growing, and that sell their products and services outside of the community.
- Enhance and expand county-wide a Business Retention and Expansion program to identify and provide assistance to resolve local employer/business issues and needs by (2016).
- Work with affiliate regional and state organizations to identify trends and opportunities for potential location here. (Ongoing).

MEASUREMENTS

- From the expanded target industries list, have two site visits from prospective companies in 2016.
- By 2nd quarter of 2016 have four businesses complete Economic Gardening and begin implementation strategies.
- Coordinate with the Chamber to target 25 businesses throughout the County in 2016 for expanded Business Retention visits and analyze, track and collect data.
- Have at least two local businesses identify new target industries that will lead to job creation or retention.

DRIVER CHAMPION	Paul Nevanen paul@businessupnorth.com (218) 283-8585
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	Chamber, Borderland YP, businesses, local lenders, SBDC, Rainy River Community College, MN DEED
REFERENCE INFO	In the Community Survey business, industry, employment and economy was one of the three most important factors to 77% of respondents yet 52% were dissatisfied with the employment opportunities in the county.

DEVELOP A SKILLED, TRAINED AND EDUCATED WORKFORCE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF THE AREA

A regional assessment conducted by Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF) indicated a shortage of skilled and post-secondary educated workers to fill current and future job openings in Koochiching County. In addition, a recurring theme in the Voyage Forward survey was to “build and promote an educated workforce.” It is imperative to begin identifying workforce needs and the resources available to address those needs.

Recommendations provided by NGKF target key resources and strategies to consider when gathering, assessing, and applying data on workforce needs and the skills of the existing workforce. These recommendations include: utilizing the Business, Retention, and Expansion program, surveying businesses through Chamber Grow MN visits, becoming an ACT Work Ready Community, implementing National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) testing, organizing quarterly meetings to identify skills shortages and training needs, and pursuing grants to develop skills training programs.

In order to retain and expand existing businesses, along with attracting new businesses, there must be a skilled workforce that is readily available to fill open positions. An ongoing collaboration of local business, education, workforce development, government, and economic development leaders is necessary to determine workforce needs and the skills shortage in order to strategize how we can develop a 21st century workforce.

OUTCOMES

- | | |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Determine the skills of the existing workforce <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. By 07/01/16 have skills identified for 1500 workers b. By 12/01/17 have skills identified for 3000 workers c. By 12/01/20 have skills identified for 6000 workers 2) Determine workforce needs of businesses <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. By 07/01/16 have the workforce needs of 30% of businesses identified b. By 12/01/17 have the workforce needs of 60% of businesses identified c. By 12/01/20 have the workforce needs of 75% of businesses identified | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Create a strategic plan to begin addressing workforce development and business needs by 12/01/16 4) Utilize data collected from 1 and 2 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Implement strategic plan by 04/01/17 5) Measure, evaluate and adjust strategic plan by 12/01/17 |
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MEASUREMENTS

- Gather a list of the skills of 6,000 members of the existing labor force in Koochiching County by 12/1/2020.
- Gather a list of the workforce needs of 75% of businesses in Koochiching County by 12/1/2020.
- Strategic Plan implemented by 4/1/17.

DRIVER CHAMPIONS	Sheila Demenge Tammy Riley	Sheila.Demenge@state.mn.us Tammy.Riley@nemojt.org	218-283-9427 218-735-6130
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	Tammy Cook (RRCC); Jean Evens, WorkForce Center Proposed Stakeholders: Representatives from: Rainy River Community College, Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, KEDA/EDP, school districts, business/management, healthcare, manufacturing, transportation, natural resources/agriculture, information technology, human services, County Commissioners, city officials, Advanced MN		
REFERENCE INFO	Newmark Grubb Knight Frank Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT Analysis—skills of local labor force unknown • Labor Force Demographics – top concern for employers is talent shortages and lack of sustainable workforce • Community Poll – identified as county’s biggest weaknesses: #1 Lack of Labor Force #3 Technical/Vocational Skills Voyage Forward Countywide Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify jobs, skills, educational opportunities 		

INVEST IN & MAINTAIN HIGH QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS & IS ALIGNED WITH COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS & PRIORITIES

As noted in the Newmark Strategy Report, quality infrastructure in a competitive environment is critical to business recruitment and existing business growth. In their SWOT Analysis, Koochiching County scored strong in the infrastructure area with rail (including shortline), airports, water, and wastewater. Broadband and cell phone coverage ranked weaker, especially in some geographic areas. In the Voyage Forward Survey (pg. 79) reliable cell phone service ranked 4th and high-speed internet ranked 5th among County residents in terms of most important infrastructure needs. Several providers are currently extending broadband into under-served areas. Improving cell coverage - especially in several key geographies (Rainy Lake and resort areas) remains more problematic and should be a focus.

Several important infrastructure projects are currently underway - Int'l. Falls International Airport Terminal Expansion, Island View Sewer Expansion Project. The Airport Terminal Project is currently funded for Phase I of the project and is seeking additional bonding dollars (\$3M) to complete Phase II. The Island View Sewer Extension Project is 77% funded and is seeking \$4-\$6M in additional funding through state and federal sources.

Since wetlands impact a significant amount of Koochiching County, wetlands mitigation will play a role in virtually any project or development site. To that end, The City of International Falls and Koochiching County have invested in creating wetland banks for future development. Continued investment and coordination of wetlands acreage should be included in future planning.

Basic infrastructure – roads, bridges, water, and sewer – a critical to future growth and development. These systems are facing maintenance, operation, and funding challenges, especially in the rural and southern parts of the county.

OUTCOMES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within two years 85% of Koochiching County residents will have access to “high-speed” broadband (as defined by the State) • By 2020 95% of residents will have access to high speed broadband • Develop cell phone coverage strategy for key gap areas in the next 12-18 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a second “Shovel Ready” site to the county’s development site inventory by (2016). • Maintain updated marketing materials (paper and digital) for all identified development sites by (Done - but ongoing updating required). • Continue to develop wetland credits for future projects. |
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MEASUREMENTS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within two years increase county-wide access to high speed broadband to 85% • Secure additional funding for Falls International Airport Terminal Project and Island View Sewer to begin construction in 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have second “shovel ready” site certified in 2016 • Prepare and begin implementing cell phone strategy in 2016-2017. |
|---|---|

DRIVER CHAMPION	Individual cities, Koochiching County
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	Harley Droba & Preston Hoy (unconfirmed), County, Cities, service providers, Dave Serrano, Soil & Water Board, Rainy Lake resort owners, Blandin Broadband, DEED
REFERENCE INFO	When asked what they would do with infrastructure if they were in charge respondents to the 4 Questions said: Fix, improve and maintain roads, highways, and sidewalks throughout county. Develop a transportation system county-wide and to surrounding areas. High speed Internet and cell phone service need to be improved and expanded throughout the county.

POSITION THE VOYAGE FORWARD REGION AS A QUALITY TOURIST DESTINATION

The Voyage Forward region (Koochiching County) contains critical natural assets with its lakes, parks, rivers and trails. We will build on our existing natural and cultural capital for four-season recreational opportunities to include its premier camping destinations, ATV trails, snowmobile trails, cross country ski trails, bike paths, canoeing and kayaking waterways, world class fisheries, and Voyageurs National Park (VNP).

To support tourism development efforts, broad community understanding of tourism is needed. Creating a shared understanding of tourism and building awareness of its benefits will encourage residents to get involved.

To successfully harness and sustain these opportunities, community involvement, collaboration and planning are necessary. We will build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism from local governments, civic organizations and user groups and disseminate this information nationwide.

OUTCOMES

- Develop a targeted plan to involve the Voyage Forward community in strategies to implement the University of Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Development in VNP communities and apply the strategies region-wide.
- Provide organizational leadership in creating a regional tourism plan that aligns the shared values of the region.
- Enhance the availability of information about the region on the internet and in each Voyage Forward and Destination Voyageurs National Park community.
- Promote Voyageurs National Park as not only an asset but also as a partner with the community.
- Develop a joint plan between MHS and Koochiching County for the re-opening of the Grand Mound site by 2017.

MEASUREMENTS

- Development of a regional tourism marketing plan by 2017.
- Implementation of U of M Sustainable Tourism strategies by 2017.

DRIVER CHAMPION	Eric Johnson (Co-Champion) eric@internationaldentalarts.com 218-244-6506
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	VNP, CVB, DVNP, HOCP, DNR, Fort Frances, resort owners, guides, snowmobile clubs and other regional businesses, Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce, Backus Community Center, golf and disc golf courses, lodging and resort owners, museums in US and Canada, VNP gateway communities, Grand Mound/MHS/Koochiching County Commissioners
REFERENCE INFO	In the Community Survey 92% of respondents felt tourism was important to their quality of life and 79% felt the Grand Mound Historical Site and Interpretive Center should be reopened. The Newmark Economic Adjustment Strategy recommended focusing tourism development on the natural beauty of the area, Voyageurs National Park, and recreation opportunities.

MAXIMIZE CROSS-BORDER OPPORTUNITIES IN SUPPORT OF VOYAGE FORWARD GOALS

Our location on the US-Canada border is a major resource for our residents, guests and businesses. It's also part of our community identity. Our communities are intertwined: many families span the border and many locals frequently enjoy the shopping, dining, youth and recreational activities of both nations.

Together, our communities are stronger, and have more to offer our visitors and ourselves. The potential, however, is not fully realized. Many residents rarely or ever cross the border, whether because they lack the documents, dislike the process or simply haven't thought about the greater opportunities available by using both halves of the region.

Our futures are intertwined. Increasing use of the border supports many of the Voyage Forward goals:

- An expanded workforce and skill set
- Attracting and retaining people
- Diversity of businesses and jobs
- Quality of place: beautification and signage
- Outdoor recreational opportunities

OUTCOMES

- Increased tourism, retail sales and participation at events.
- Increased border crossings.
- Increase awareness cross-border opportunities and rules.
- Increased ease of obtaining border crossing documents with locals on both sides of the border to guide applicants through the process.
- Identify improvements to the border crossing process.
- Beautification of the border crossing. Make crossing the border itself a fun and attractive thing to do.
- Joint marketing for tourism, retail opportunities, and events.
- Increased healthcare partnerships

MEASUREMENTS

- Statistics on local and non-local crossings at our local border.
- Statistics on the value of \$US and \$CA currency exchange at local banks
- Increased international attendance at cultural and entertainment events.
- Information on international shopping and dining

DRIVER CHAMPION	
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	US/Canadian customs & border patrol, CN Rail, government organizations, Chambers of Commerce, cultural & entertainment institutions, retail & restaurant businesses, CVB, media outlets, Rainy River First Nations
REFERENCE INFO	<p>Voyage Forward Survey: 76% said yes we should be more proactive in working with Fort Frances on economic and community development efforts and cited five major areas of focus.</p> <p>Newmark: We should place more emphasis on collaborative efforts to drive investment in tourism and job creation on both sides of the border. They highlighted several similar areas of focus.</p>

CREATE A UNIFORMLY ATTRACTIVE COUNTY AND MEANS TO EXPLORE IT

Knowing that first impressions of visitors can only be made once and knowing that pride of place promotes satisfaction with one’s home; Koochiching County will strive towards a shared vision of an attractive environment. Helping people explore the county will enhance appreciation of its varied assets.

Nine out of ten citizens of Koochiching County expressed in Voyage Forward surveys a strong desire for a vision and plan for beautification of our communities. Issues mentioned include improving the condition of buildings, streetscapes, and natural and manmade thoroughfares as well as a need for code enforcement.

Need for coordinated marketing of the area’s attractions was expressed in consultant recommendations, tied to development of tourism as an economic engine. Uniform signage and maps lead to a better appreciation and use of community assets.

OUTCOMES

- Create a beautification plan for Koochiching County that expands upon the Gateway principles by 6/2017.
- Create a unified wayfinding signage system for the County that ties into regional systems and is available in a range of formats by 12/2017.

MEASUREMENTS

- Uniform attractive signage in place
- Map of signed locations & interest points
- Local government enforcement of standards
- Clean up programs in place involving generations
- Customer service education for 90% of businesses

DRIVER CHAMPION	
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	Grand Mound/MHS, schools and youth, County Board, city councils, CVB, Chamber of Commerce, Heart of Continent Partnership, Gateway Committee, property owners, MnDOT, service organizations, Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce, Backus Community Center, golf and disc golf courses, lodging and resort owners, museums in US and Canada
REFERENCE INFO	92% of respondents to the Community Survey believe there should be a beautification plan for our communities and should be a county-wide effort.

CREATE A QUALITY OF LIFE ENVIRONMENT WHICH PROVIDES FOR A HEALTHY AND ENGAGED COMMUNITY FOR RESIDENTS IN ALL PHASES OF LIFE

Providing a range of healthy activities and social support leads to retention and growth of populations.

Voyage Forward surveys revealed a need for increased youth activities, cultural offerings attractive to young adults and their families, and for meaningful support and engagement of an aging population.

Youth must be provided opportunities to experience arts, culture, and recreational activities. Furthermore, our younger generations need to become more engaged in the decision making process as we grow our region.

Families must have the option to “live local” with quality health care, educational, arts, cultural, and recreation opportunities. The county’s percentage of older adults is growing faster than other segments and the resources must be in place for this segment of the population to remain in our region.

Potential additions to the county fabric may include such amenities as a Boys and Girls Club, an inter-generational active living center, day care for all ages, increased housing and services county wide for older adults, more community service opportunities for engaging youth and younger adults.

OUTCOMES

- Once the Youth Engagement project is complete (Jan 2016), prioritize and integrate those activities and ideas identified by our youth into our long range plan to improve our quality of life.
- Review of existing needs assessments and further inquiry.
- A forum by stakeholders to determine potential activities, priorities and their feasibility.
- A task force to act on developed priority recommendations.

MEASUREMENTS

- Prioritized list of needs and feasible activities to address them.
- Formation of a task force to act on recommendations.
- Younger generations are actively engaged in our “Journey to Success.”

DRIVER CHAMPION	
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	School Districts, County Health, KOOTASCA, RRCC, Kooch Aging Options, County Community Education, social providers, Backus Community Center, Community Wellness Action Council, care providers, home health agencies, care facilities, RSVP, Libraries, County Recreation Committee
REFERENCE INFO	<p>Voyage Forward Survey: Recreation, arts, culture & youth activities ranked by 65% of respondents as Very High (p.34).</p> <p>495 of 798 respondents ranked a Boys & Girls Club as “Most Desirable” (p. 71).</p> <p>Boys & Girls Club also ranks #2 as “most important” (p. 86).</p>

DIVERSIFY OUR POPULATION, BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND JOB BASE BY ATTRACTING AND RETAINING PEOPLE AND THEIR TALENTS

Concerns about the aging and dwindling population of the Koochiching County area were expressed repeatedly throughout the Four Questions and the Community Survey process.

There is a strong desire to see more youth stay in our communities upon completion of their education in order to ensure the future of the area as economically viable while retaining the quality of life we hold so dear.

Additionally, the people of the Koochiching County area want new ideas and innovation from outside of the area, and more employment opportunities in varying fields.

The Four Questions and the Community Survey process also brought to light a desire by many to return to this area but a reluctance to do so due to the challenging realities of finding sustaining, meaningful employment and the lack of some amenities to which they've become accustomed.

A greater availability of employment opportunities requiring a high level of education, along with lifestyle amenities such as shopping, restaurants, and entertainment would encourage an increase in the population of educated, career-minded individuals and their families; the very people who are likely to spur innovation and new business.

OUTCOMES

- A vibrant restaurant scene offering a variety of dining choices and experiences
- Better shopping and more specialty shopping
- Increase in educated workers and their families
- Opportunities for young people to start and grow into a meaningful career
- Entertainment options beyond hunting, fishing, and outdoor activities

MEASUREMENTS

- By specific date:
- Net increase in population among certain demographics
 - Increase in skilled/educated employment
 - A met need for additional lifestyle amenities

DRIVER CHAMPION	
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	BYP, young adults, UM Extension, 39 – 50 year olds wishing to return/relocate
REFERENCE INFO	A key theme for improving the region in the 4 Question Interviews was a need for innovative small businesses and amenities and incentives to attract and retain people.

VOYAGE FORWARD STRATEGIC PLANNING TERMINOLOGY

Vision Statement: The big picture idea of what we want to achieve. This is what we want our community to be in the future.

Mission Statement: A general statement about why we exist to achieve our Vision.

Values: These describe what we believe in and how we behave.

Destiny Drivers: Outcome based goals. These are the goals we must achieve to realize our Vision.

Rationale: A call to action and explanation of why the Destiny Driver is important, why it was selected.

Outcomes: These are specific, time-bound, measurable objectives to fulfilling our Destiny Drivers.

Action Steps: Specific implementation steps to achieve Outcomes (objectives) and Destiny Drivers (goals). These are not included in the Destiny Driver Template. Driver Champions will need to develop these after specific Outcomes have been chosen.

Measurements: These are the metrics we will use to gauge progress on the successful implementation of our Destiny Drivers and Outcomes.

Driver Champion: A person (or group of persons) who takes ownership to promote, guide, and successfully implement a Destiny Driver.

Key Stakeholders: The people and organizations that must be involved for a Destiny Driver to be successful. Key Stakeholders have a fundamental impact on the Destiny Driver and are continuously involved throughout the process.

Note: Other community participants are encouraged to be involved if they have a sincere interest and commitment to a given Driver and its Outcomes.

APPENDIX



ECONOMIC RESPONSE/VOYAGE FORWARD WORKING TEAMS

ECONOMIC RESPONSE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Bob Anderson	Mayor, City of International Falls (co-chair)	Pete Kalar	Councilor, City of International Falls
Harley Droba	Councilor, City of International Falls	Wade Pavleck	County Commissioner, Koochiching County (co-chair)
Rob Ecklund	County Commissioner, Koochiching County		

WORKER RETENTION AND ASSISTANCE TEAM

Back, Randy	Glowack, Jackie	Lyman, Lori	Ufford, Michelle
Bahr, Renae	Hackenmueller, Alysa	Meadows, Myrna	
DeMenge, Sheila (co- chair)	Hebner, Michelle	Murray, Terry	
Fellner, Jenell	Helland, Carol	Riley, Tammy (co-chair)	

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION TEAM

Hebig, Dave	Herman, Jenny (co-chair)	Rognerud, Gail	Whitbeck, Faye
Henderson, Pat	Lyman, Lori	Schultz, Pete (co-chair)	

LONG TERM VISION, ASSET & STRATEGY TEAM

Bartkowski, Jay	Jaksa, Cynthia	Natysin, Sue (co-chair)	Smith, JoAnn
Davenport, Rob	Johnson, Eric	Nevanen, Paul	Struss, Jerry
Evens, Jean	Rand, Heather	Odegaard, Dan	Talley, Shane
Gautreaux, Sherril	Mason, Shawn	Riley, Scott	Wellcome, Michael (co- chair)
Hubley, Andy	McBride, Brian	Skrief, Doug	

ECONOMIC RESPONSE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

DeMenge, Sheila	Natysin, Sue	Schultz, Pete
Herman, Jenny	Riley, Tammy	Wellcome, Michael



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Adams, Diane	Coulombe, Todd	Lehman, Loren	Renollet, Tami
Anderson, E.L. (Andy)	Eklund, Paul	Lyman, Lori	Rognerud, Gail
Anderson, Tim	Elhard, Dave	Mason, Shawn	Rognerud, Nancy
Arnold, Kay	Echternach, Jared	McKelvey, Jenn	Saxton, Ted
Barnhart, Andy	Fisher, Barb	Meadows, Myrna	Schaak, Trina
Bartkowski, Julie	Fletcher, Colleen	Merrill, Ward <i>(co-chair)</i>	Schwartz, Joe
Bilben, Sharon	Franchot, Doug	Miller, Kate	Struss, Jerry
Bolstad, Patti	Frank, Lindsay	Naeckel, Lynn	Ward, Betsy
Briggs, Brian	Glowack, Jackie	Nelson, Judith	Ward, Mike
Briggs, Dianne	Grover, Kevin	Olesen, Soren	Wellcome, Mike
Briggs, Stephen	Hall, Ashley	Oveson, Pam	Yount, Jim <i>(co-chair)</i>
Christianson, Bob	Imhoff, Nancy	Pelland, Sonja	

BUZZ TEAM

Bigler, Chris <i>(co-chair)</i>	Keeney, Sandi	Pearson, Jordan	Sjoblom, Jason <i>(co-chair)</i>
Borgen, Tyler	Lewis, Cora	Roberts, Kenni	Sueker, Brenda
Droba, Harley	Lindemanis, Marta	Schaaf, Austin	Sueker, Mark
Glowasky, Travis	Merrill, Linda	Silvers, Anja	Whitbeck, Faye
Jaksa, Cynthia	Olson, Darren	Sjoblom, Jaime	

LOCAL PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Jenny Herman, Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Paul Nevanen, Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA)

Shawn Mason, International Falls EDA

Michael Wellcome, Local Voyage Forward Coordinator

PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT TEAM

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission

Josh Bergstad
Pat Henderson

Northspan Group, Inc.

Randy Lasky
Lisa Bonow

National Center for Economic Gardening

Newmark Grubb Knight Frank – Strategy

Becky Capelle
Bob Hess
Kim Moore
Gregg Wassmansdorf

UMD Center for Economic Development; SBDC

Elaine Hansen
Jenny Herman

University of Minnesota Extension – Retail Assessment

John Bennett
Ryan Pesch

ONLINE PRESENCE

Voyage Forward Web Site: All materials, reports and information developed for Voyage Forward

www.VoyageForward.org



<https://www.facebook.com/voyageforwardkoochiching/>



<https://twitter.com/VoyageForward>



Interviews: Private Sector Representatives

The following is a list of the companies interviewed over the course of NGKF's field visits

- PCA/Boise Paper
- Molpus Timberland Mgmt.
- Bergstrom Wood Products
- MD&W
- Wenberg Trucking
- Paul Bunyan Communications
- MN Power
- MN Energy
- MERC (MN Energy Resources)
- Frontier
- Northstar Electric Company
- Greentech Mfg.
- Northland Distributing & Manufacturing
- Littlefork Medical Center
- Good Samaritan Seniors Facility
- Rainy Lake Medical Center
- Essentia Health Clinic
- United Health
- Swanky Sweetpea
- Littlefork Computer Repair & Mobile DJ
- SoundNorth
- Randy Pozniak, CPA
- True Star Credit Union
- Bremer Bank
- Border State Bank
- Coca Cola Bottling
- Island View Realty
- Sandy Point Lodge
- Days Inn
- Rainy Lake Houseboats
- Northstar Publishing
- NORFAB aka Dynamic Homes
- International BuildRite
- Border Boxes
- Bowman Construction
- Up North Builders
- Wagner Construction
- Al Shannon Plumbing & Heating
- CN Rail
- MANNCO Trucking
- Green Forest Inc.
- New Gold Inc.



Interviews: Public Sector & Community Representatives

The following is a list of the public sector and community organizations interviewed over the course of NGKF's field visits

- ARDC
- Northspan
- International Falls EDA
- KEDA
- Voyage Forward
- City of International Falls
- City of Northome
- City of Big Falls
- City of Littlefork
- City of Ranier
- Koochiching County
- Rainy River Community College
- Minnesota WorkForce Center
- Minnesota DEED
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Highway 53 Commission
- North Koochiching Sanitary Sewer District
- East Koochiching Sanitary Sewer District
- International Falls School District
- Littlefork School District
- Northome School District
- International Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Backus Community Center
- Convention & Visitors Bureau
- City of Fort Frances
- Rainy River Future Development Corp.
- Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce
- Bob Walls, Labor Representative
- Voyageurs National Park
- U.S. Border Patrol
- Port of International Falls, U.S. Customs
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- International Falls Airport