



Date: October 13, 2016

To: Koochiching Economic Development Authority

Subject: One-year Funding Voyage Forward Administration

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Funding for Voyage Forward has been provided through a grant from the Federal Economic Development Agency (EDA) with matching funds from Koochiching County and International Falls.

The EDA Grant ended on December 31, 2015 with the remaining balance of matching funds returned to Koochiching County and the City of International Falls.

The Voyage Forward Coalition, consisting of Destiny Driver Champions and at-large members, conducted a thorough review of our financial requirements through calendar year 2017.

In order to maintain our Journey to Success, it is requested \$5,000 be made available to Voyage Forward to meet *administrative needs from October 2016 through December 31, 2017*.

Enclosure (1) itemizes funding sources, expenditures, and justification for use of the funds. A brief summary of our progress over the past five months is included in enclosure (2).

Ongoing support from KEDA is critical to the success of Voyage Forward. As explained in enclosure (1), the in-kind ratio of over 2.5 to 1 is an excellent investment in the future of our region. Without the funding support, it will be difficult to continue our efforts.

Respectfully Submitted:

Voyage Forward Coalition

Tammy Riley, Sheila Demenge, Ward Merrill, Douglas Skrief, Jim Yount, Travis Glowasky, Eric Johnson, Sherrill Gautreaux, Paul Nevanen, Myrna Meadows, Alysa Hackenmueller, Michael Wellcome

**Voyage Forward Vision**

*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.*

**Enclosure (1)**

**Justification**

There has been tremendous community support for the Voyage Forward effort. The Destiny Driver Champions and Stewards continue their work to turn goals into actions. Although these volunteers are not being paid, there is a considerable investment of their time and as the old adage says, “time is money”. We are working as volunteers, not as paid employees and will continue to do so.

There is also considerable support from outside of our immediate region. The Northeast Higher Education District (NHED) has generously contributed \$1,000 in support of the Voyage Forward effort. Their continued involvement in the Workforce Development Destiny Driver is a clear indication of their desire to enhance the workforce skills of our citizens.

The Voyage Forward initiative is not a 501(c) 3 organization. In fact, we are not an “organization” at all. We are concerned citizens with a common vision to make our community the best it can be. Without a recognized organization, we cannot accept the donation from NHED. To fill this void, Citizens for Backus/AB has agreed to be our fiscal agent and manage donations to Voyage Forward.

The immediate (through calendar year 2017) funding requirements are threefold;

Purchase one-year subscription to Survey Monkey	\$300
Maintain the Voyage Forward Website	\$3,000
Communications and Marketing	\$2,700
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$6,000</i>

Survey Monkey: The one-year subscription to Survey Monkey, a web based survey tool, will be shared among all Destiny Drivers. Foremost, the Workforce Development Driver will conduct research to address the “lack of a skilled and educated” workforce as identified by Koochiching County businesses. Two surveys will be conducted. The first survey will target businesses in the county to determine their workforce needs. The second survey will target individuals to determine the skills of the existing workforce. Once the skills gap is identified, the information will be disseminated to educational institutions to develop relevant training opportunities. It will also be shared with economic development agencies to help retain, expand, and attract businesses.

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Voyage Forward Website: It is of utmost importance to maintain the Voyage Forward website. The website provides information on the work being completed by the Destiny Drivers and will include all agendas, minutes, and project updates as our Journey to Success unfolds. Our current contract with BigFish Digital expired on October 1, 2016. In preparation of continuing the website, the Voyage Forward Coalition requested bids from four local service providers and BigFish Digital. The anticipated cost of revamping the site and maintaining our presence on the web for one year is \$3,000. The anticipated cost for follow-on years is under \$1,000.

Communications and Marketing: Keeping the public informed and involved is crucial to the continued success of Voyage Forward. These funds will be used to purchase media - time to seek additional volunteers and provide up-to-date information to citizens throughout the county and neighboring communities.

Since the grant ended on December 31, 2015, there has been a substantial investment in keeping the Voyage Forward effort moving. There have been *no county or city funds expended by the Voyage Forward effort since the call-to-action. Additionally, there have been no county funds expended to support the Destiny Drivers.* We have relied upon contributions from the business community and volunteer time provided by our Champions and Stewards.

For example, the Voyage Forward team published a 16-page tabloid which was sent to every business and individual in the county and neighboring communities. The cost of this tabloid was paid for by:

Northstar Publishing	\$2,062.00
Backus	\$780.00 (In-kind mailing expenses)
Minnesota Power	\$500.00

Matching or in-kind contributions:

Northeast Higher Education District (NHED): A generous cash contribution to the Voyage Forward effort was provided by NHED. The funds are being managed by Citizens for Backus/AB and will be accessed as necessary by the Voyage Forward Coalition.

Northeast Higher Ed District	\$1,000.00
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Destiny Driver Expenses: There is considerable cost to develop the Destiny Drivers and turn them into actionable projects which enhance our community. These in-kind

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expenses include volunteer time and administrative costs such as telephone, travel, and printing. Through the end of calendar year 2017 these costs are expected to be about \$12,500. On average, each Destiny Driver has eight volunteers, including a Champion and Co-Champion. Sixty-four volunteers are participating in the Voyage Forward effort. As projects are identified and become more focused, this number is expected to increase. The approximate in-kind expenses are:

Volunteer wages	\$12,000
Travel, phone, printing	\$500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,500</b>

Summary of funding sources October 2016 through December 31, 2017:

	In-Kind	Cash
Northeast Higher Ed District		\$1,000
VF Volunteers	\$12,500	
<b>KEDA</b>		<b>\$5,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,500</b>	<b>\$6,000</b>

Anticipated Process:

Funding requests would flow through the Voyage Forward Coalition and include justification with a supporting narrative. Each request would be reviewed and approved by the Coalition prior to submission to the Fiscal Agent. The Fiscal agent may be Backus or the KEDA Board.

*It should be noted NONE of the requested funds are project specific. The funds support the ongoing efforts of Voyage Forward and NONE are used for personnel costs.*

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## Enclosure (2)

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### Accomplishments

Work on the Destiny Drivers began after the County-wide Call to Action on February 25, 2016. Between March and August 1<sup>st</sup>, we created and published a tabloid that was sent to every resident and business in the region, completed two of the ten Destiny Drivers, and have begun to identify projects that will support the community and economic development initiatives in our region.

The Champions and Stewards are passionate and eager to put the Destiny Drivers into actionable projects to maintain our Journey to Success. Below is a brief summary of what we accomplished and what our future projects *may* entail.

#### **Develop an organizational framework to lead, facilitate, communicate, and sustain Voyage Forward**

*This Destiny Driver is complete with the establishment of the Voyage Forward Coalition.*

Prior to the end of the grant, facilitation of meetings was conducted by the Northspan Group and supported by the Economic Response Team. Since then, Champions and Stewards have developed an organizational framework to lead, facilitate, communicate, and sustain Voyage Forward. The *Voyage Forward Coalition* consists of Destiny Driver Champions and four at-large members.

The Coalition serves as the voice of Voyage Forward: informing the county citizens of action and progress; marketing; and acting as the single point of contact.

#### **Develop an organizational framework to lead and facilitate implementation of key economic development strategies**

*This Destiny Driver is complete with the establishment of the Voyage Forward Marketing Partnership.*

The number one recommendation from the Newmark 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.

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The *Voyage Forward Marketing Partnership* was created to develop a unified brand and messaging which reflects the entire county to be used in all communications, marketing materials and initiatives. The Partnership consists of representatives from each city, business, financial institution, RRCC, the Chamber, and CVB.

### **Workforce Development Destiny Driver | Benefit to Koochiching County and Economic Development:**

- Business Workforce Needs Survey: Data collected will be used to address skills gaps through potential training opportunities to develop a skilled workforce. (Training programs through RRCC, customized training, workshops, on-the-job training, internships, etc.)
- Identify Skills of Existing Workforce: A key element in deciding to expand, relocate, or start a business is workforce availability and skills. Data collected can be used to market the workforce to current and new businesses to support economic development countywide.

### **Maximize Cross-Border Opportunities |**

- Additional site for cross border check in: Bohman's Landing is a small, often inconvenient area that is not conducive to handling large vessels. It is often times crowded with people launching or retrieving boats. People using the remote check-in ties up very limited dock space during the check-in process.
- Brochure on Border Crossing: Collation and publishing of collected information on requirements for vendors at events on both sides of bridge. The brochure would be a reference to be used by vendors doing business on both sides of the border.
- Create YouTube video on cross border questions: It was apparent during the Customs presentations there are a number of myths concerning the requirements and documentation needed to cross the border. Both the brochure and video will address these issues.

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### **Quality of Life**

- Responding to Voyage Forward survey results and to community conversations around the need for more activities for youths and families and, perhaps, added facilities to accommodate growth, the Driver committee has initiated targeted stakeholder conversations, preparing to broaden this discussion to the county. Initial considerations have included thoughts about an activity facility with a broad number of tenants concerned about quality opportunities for socializing and recreation.
- This driver is well represented by parents of youngsters concerned about day care opportunities in the area. Discussions have led to creation of “Koochiching Moms” on Facebook, a forum for exchanging information about care options for new and established families. The site has over 525 members and is a valuable tool for those seeking day care opportunities.

### **Quality of Place**

- Passion for the communities and a desire to make the area look better, more attractive and more welcoming drives this effort.
- There has been an initial discussion of a possible Uniform Wayfinding System implemented County-wide. As an example the group was presented with photos of the “Edge of the Wilderness Scenic Byway” signage, parks, way stops in Big Falls & Effie.

### **Outdoor Recreation and Tourism**

- This group works to create a different view of the many assets of our area such as biking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, ATV and snowmobile trails
- Voyageur ATV Club is now in place with a goal of expanding ATV Trails and connecting them to neighboring communities.

### **Grow and Diversify Business and Jobs**

- 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 and it costs 100 times more to recruit new businesses...” This Driver has met several times and has added some members. Our project focus will

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be on conducting a county-wide Business Retention and Expansion program in conjunction with the University of MN Extension Office.

**Quality Infrastructure:**

This Destiny Driver is currently on hold until a champion has been identified.

**Diversify our population by attracting and retaining youth**

This Destiny Driver is currently on hold until a champion has been identified.

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