Board of County Commissioners
Agenda Request

Aitkin County

3A

Agenda Item #

Requested Meeting Date: February 23, 2016

Title of Item: Accept Blandin Foundation Grant to extend Web Diagnostics Program

	Action Requested:	
✓ REGULAR AGENDA	✓ Approve/Deny Motion	☐ Direction Requested
☐ CONSENT AGENDA		☐ Discussion Item
☐ INFORMATION ONLY	☐ Adopt Resolution (attach draft)	☐ Hold Public Hearing*

provide copy of hearing notice that was published

Submitted by:	Department:
Ross Wagner	Economic Development & Forest Ind

Presenter (Name and Title):	Estimated Time Needed:
Ross Wagner, Economic Development & Forest Industry Coordinator	10 Minutes

Summary of Issue:

Aitkin County has recently completed the Aitkin County Web Diagnostics for Small Businesses program. We were able to help 11 businesses with the limited amount of funding we had. Overall the program was very successful with many positive comments received. Initially we started with a $1,312.50 contribution from Aitkin County and a $3,938.00 grant from the Blandin Foundation. Due to the success of the initial program, the Central Woodlands Blandin Broadband Community, would like to take the model developed by Aitkin County and offer this program to businesses within the Central Woodlands, which includes Aitkin County. The funding would be a $25,000.00 grant from the Blandin Foundation with the match provided by the East Central Regional Development Commission. I would administer the program through my office as I have the experience from our earlier project. This would allow us to continue to offer this program with no cost to the county other than my time.

Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:

Recommended Action/Motion:

Approve

Financial Impact:

Is there a cost associated with this request? ☐ Yes ✓ No

What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? $

Is this budgeted? ☐ Yes ✓ No *Please Explain:*

Match for grant is provided by the East Central Regional Development Commission

Legally binding agreements must have County Attorney approval prior to submission.

Business Name: _____

Contact: _____

Phone, e-mail: _____

Address: _____

State Business ID#: _____

Brief Description of what you want to do, check boxes below: _____

_____

Through the Aitkin County Web Diagnostics for Small Business Owners, any business located in Aitkin County is eligible to receive up to 4 hours of free, web based marketing assistance.
Guidelines:

- The program provides up to 4 hours of free consultation on web based marketing or social media. Specific areas of assistance that is available through the program are listed below.
- You may check any and all programs you feel most beneficial to your business, however, the 4 hour time limit applies, so be sure to prioritize the assistance you are looking for.
- Aitkin County estimates that approximately 31 businesses will be able to receive this free assistance, if there is sufficient demand, we will look at the program again in 2016.

This service would be tailored to web location services such as Google and yelp, basics of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), using web analytics and social media. If a business is already using these services the program would provide an update or refresher session to make sure the business is utilizing these web tools to their maximum capacity. The person doing the web diagnostics would not be a web designer or provide content for a business's website. However, within the 4 hours of time, basic instructions on starting, designing and hosting a website would be allowable.

- _____ Managing online Reviews
  - o Managing an online presence is now an essential business practice. This includes monitoring and responding to reviews posted on social media sites such as Yelp and Trip Advisor.

- _____ Mobile eMarketing
  - o Mobile devices like iPhones and Androids generate the bulk of internet traffic now. Having a mobile version of a business website and being accessible through multiple mobile search engines is considered essential by many businesses.

- _____ Location based services
  - o From Google Maps to Yelp, people now rely on location based services to find goods and services.

- _____ Getting high on Google (search engine optimization)
  - o Getting to the top of Google's search results is a marketing priority of many businesses. Making sure that your website represents all that your business has to offer is the primary way to get the top search rankings.

- _____ Using analytics to inform business decisions
  - Analytics is the recorded data of how many visitors come to your website, what pages they went to, and what content they engaged with. Most business websites have analytic data available for the website but do not have a clear idea of how to use it to make decisions.

- _____ Social media for business
  - Facebook, many who have Facebook business pages or a Twitter account struggle to make good use of them. Explore strategies and tactics small businesses are using to engage with customers using social media. Small businesses are increasingly, successfully using social media to engage with the customers and improving their bottom line.
  - Branding is an area where some businesses could use assistance – or just advice on being consistent across all their social media and web outlets with logos and messaging. Another possible service to consider would be video marketing -- a lot of smaller companies can use YouTube videos to drive traffic to their websites.