



Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

10A
Agenda Item #

Requested Meeting Date: 04-14-2026

Title of Item: Award Grants, BD&R Grant

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA <input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA	Action Requested: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft) <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing <i>*provide copy of hearing notice that was published</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item <input type="checkbox"/> Information Only
Submitted by: Mark Jeffers		Department: Economic Development
Presenter (Name and Title): Mark Jeffers, Economic Development Coordinator		Estimated Time Needed: 10 minutes
Summary of Issue: <p>The Aitkin County Economic Development Committee has received and reviewed grant funding requests for the Business Development & Recreation Grant Program. Grant applications and grant award summary are included.</p> <p>The Committee was unanimous on the recommendation. The Committee recommends and requests approval to award the following grants at this time:</p> <p>Women Leading the Way Event \$2,000 Farm to Fridge at the Beanery \$2,000 Food as Medicine Speaker Series \$2,000</p> <p>The purpose of this grant fund is to leverage county funds, private funds, and volunteer efforts to enhance small business development activities in Aitkin County, with a focus on increasing sustained tourism and recreational events. Organizations may apply individually or submit a joint application. To demonstrate their commitment to the grant request, organizations must provide a 1:1 match of funds in good faith. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners has approved this funding to be used directly for the benefit of the Aitkin County community through the Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant</p>		
Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments: 		
Recommended Action/Motion: Economic Development requests approval of a motion to award the recommended grants.		
Financial Impact: <i>Is there a cost associated with this request?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$</i> <i>Is this budgeted?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>Please Explain:</i>		

Business Development and Recreation Grant

#	Facility Name	Project Name	Contact Name	Email	City	Phone	\$ requested	\$ Awarded
1	Long Lake Conservation Foundation	Nature Rocks	Dave McMillan	dave@longlakecc.org	Palisade	218.768.4653	\$ 2,000	-
2	American Peat Technology	Food as Medicine Speaker Series	Kelley Rajala	clearlakegardens@gmail.com	Aitkin	707.331.6850	\$ 1,975	\$ 1,975
3	The Beanery	Farm to Fridge	Katy Cassidy & Amanda Lowe	explorethealingfood@gmail.com	Aitkin	763.280.1027	\$ 1,920	\$ 1,920
4	APT	Women Leading the Way	Katrina Rutz	krutz@americanpeattech.com	Aitkin	218.820.2009	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
5	Petal & Leaf Nursery	signage	Andrea Bohn	bohnandrea@icloud.com	McGregor	218.670.0629	\$ 2,000	-
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26								
							\$ 9,895	\$ 5,895



#2

Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program January 1, 2026 - December 31, 2026

1. Grant requests should be submitted by EMAIL to:

Mark.jeffers@aitkincountymn.gov

subject line: BD&R2026 or

by mail to:

Mark Jeffers

Aitkin County Government Center

307 2nd Street NW, Room 316

Aitkin, MN 56431

APPLICANT INFORMATION

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Event Name: Food as Medicine Speaker Series at the Aitkin Farmers Market

Date(s) of Project/Event: 4th Saturday of each Month - May through October 2026

Location of Project/Event: Tractor Supply Parking Lot, 190 Southgate Dr, Aitkin, MN 56431

Organization/Community Name: American Peat Technology

Person in Charge of Project: Kelley Rajala (and Peggy Jones)

Organization Mailing Address: Contact Person's Phone #: 707-331-6850

Contact Person's Email: clearlakegardens@gmail.com

Description/focus/purpose of your organization: American Peat Technology (APT) is an Aitkin-based environmental technology company serving the soil & plant health, water treatment, battery mineral, and spirits distillation industries. As a community-owned business, we are heavily invested in Aitkin's public health, economic development and rural vitality. We are committed to supporting local initiatives related to local agriculture, soil health and Aitkin's food economy. We are also a new business member of the Greater Mille Lacs Chapter of Minnesota's Sustainable Farming Association and happy to be a sponsor of this event series.

FUNDING:

Amount requested from Aitkin County \$1,975

Amount of your organization's match \$1,979

Total projected budget \$3,954

PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION: Be concise and complete

We will be producing a series of free monthly public educational events at the Aitkin Farmer's Market on the importance of fresh, local and seasonal food as it relates to personal health and wellbeing. Each session will have a 'Food as Medicine' theme featuring an educational talk and a cooking demonstration taught by a nutrition and food expert. The content will cover the topics of "food as medicine" - where food and health meet, food access, preparation, preservation and seasonal, local food sourcing. We will hold this event adjacent to the Aitkin Farmers Market on the fourth Saturday from May to October. The event series will promote our local farms, food producers and food access programs such as Find Food Aitkin County.

What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.

Our goals are to:

- Raise public awareness about the impact of food choices on participants' health and wellbeing.
- Draw people to the farmers market to promote those farms and businesses.
- Direct people to the resources of the Find Food Aitkin County program.
- Attract individuals to Aitkin County that value wellness and food to come back consistently (each month).

We want to help people learn about:

- The direct connection between what they eat and the quality of their health.
- How to take control over their physical and mental wellbeing through food education and local sourcing.
- The benefits of local, healthy, seasonal foods.
- Local farms, food businesses and food resources in Aitkin County and how they can get involved year-round.

County funds would help cover the cost of the presenter, supplies for the food demos, rent equipment, and public marketing for the event series.

Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.

We believe this event series is a great compliment to Aitkin's "Naturally Better" program. It will help position Aitkin County as a regional leader in sustainable agriculture and healthy living. The event will also create exposure and direct sales to local farm, food, and health businesses.

"Holistic wellness" and "buying local" are two trends that are attracting a lot of attention from the general public. By highlighting Aitkin's existing resources, the Food as Medicine event series could have long-lasting impacts on the participants to draw them back to the farms, food businesses, and health resources we have in Aitkin County. We believe the Food as Medicine event series will draw a wide variety of people throughout the region. We expect that seasonal residents will attend and leave the event with a greater interest in sourcing their food locally, rather than bringing all their food up from the cities. This would have a long term economic benefit for our local farms and businesses.

List target audience:

- Area residents who are wanting and/or needing to improve their physical and mental health
- Seasonal residents who currently don't shop locally
- People interested in homesteading, gardening and food preservation
- People who enjoy cooking and eating
- Sustainability enthusiasts

How many people usually attend this project/event? 150

If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract? 300

4. PROJECT BUDGET: in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Each Session	Total	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds
Speaker Fee	\$200	\$1,200	\$600	\$600
Food	\$134	\$804	\$400	\$404
Material & Supplies	\$75	\$450	\$200	\$250
Marketing & Promotion	\$100	\$600	\$600	\$0
Tent	\$50	\$300	\$0	\$300
Chair rental	\$50	\$300	\$175	\$125
Sound system	\$50	\$300	\$0	\$300
TOTALS	\$659	\$3,954	\$1,975	\$1,979



Name: Kelley Rajala, agent for American Peat Technology and the Greater Mille Lacs Chapter, Minnesota Sustainable Farming Association

Date: 2/17/26

#3



Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program

January 1, 2026 - December 31, 2026

1. Grant requests should be submitted by EMAIL to:

Mark.jeffers@aitkincountymn.gov

subject line: BD&R2026 or

by mail to:

Mark Jeffers
Aitkin County Government Center
307 2nd Street NW, Room 316
Aitkin, MN 56431

APPLICANT INFORMATION

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Event Name: Farm to Fridge Project at The Beanery

Date(s) of Project/Event: Every Wednesday from May 6th through August 26th, 2026)

Location of Project/Event: The Beanery- 221 Minnesota Ave N, Aitkin, MN 56431

Organization/Community Name: The Beanery and Explore Healing Food and Movement

Person in Charge of Project: Katy Cassady and Amanda Lowe

Organization Mailing Address: 221 Minnesota Ave N, Aitkin, MN 56431

Contact Person's Phone #: 763-280-1027

Contact Person's Email: explorehealingfood@gmail.com

Description/focus/purpose of your organization:

Explore Healing Food and Movement strengthens local food systems by connecting consumers directly with regional farmers and food producers through structured purchasing programs, curated food initiatives, and collaborative retail partnerships. Our work increases market access for small farms while driving consumer traffic to local businesses.

Website: <https://www.explorehealingfoodandmovement.com/>

FUNDING:

Amount requested from Aitkin County \$1,920

Amount of your organization's match \$2,624

Total projected budget \$4,704

PROJECT/ EVENT DESCRIPTION: Be concise and complete

Farm to Fridge Initiative – Downtown Aitkin Retail Pilot

The Farm to Fridge Initiative is a 16-week seasonal retail pilot (May–August) designed to increase downtown foot traffic, expand direct-to-consumer farm sales, and strengthen Aitkin County's agri-tourism economy.

Each Wednesday, locally grown produce and value-added products sourced through the Aitkin Food Hub will be stocked in a dedicated retail fridge located at The Beanery in downtown Aitkin. In addition, two prepared grab-and-go meals will be produced weekly using participating farms' ingredients to increase product turnover and consumer engagement.

The project creates a consistent midweek retail destination for seasonal residents, tourists, and local families seeking convenient, high-quality local food options beyond farmers market hours.

What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.

Our Goals

Over the 16-week pilot, we aim to:

- Sell out of the local farm products and prepared foods in the fridge each week
- Increase weekly downtown visits by **20-30 additional, recurring customers per week**
- Attract **100 incremental visitors to the downtown Aitkin area** (May–August projection)
- Support purchasing from **3-5 local farms** on a recurring weekly basis
- Increase cross-shopping activity at surrounding downtown businesses
- Bring awareness to the vibrant sustainable agriculture community in Aitkin county

Implementation Plan

Each week:

1. Coordinate product availability with participating farms.
2. Purchase and transport products through the Aitkin Food Hub distribution system.
3. Stock and merchandise the retail fridge in the high-visibility area of The Beanery.
4. Produce two seasonal, value-added prepared to-go items to increase product exposure and average transaction size.

5. Promote participating farms, on-farm events, and featured products through in-store signage and social media marketing (through Facebook).

This structured weekly schedule ensures consistency, predictable revenue for farms, and repeat customer engagement.

Use of Grant Funds

Grant funding will support core operational costs necessary to execute the pilot:

- Transportation and logistics for weekly farm product pickup
- Labor for coordination with producers and weekly ordering
- Merchandising, cleaning, and restocking of retail fridge
- Development and preparation of value-added food items

Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.

This project supports sustainable economic development in four key ways:

1. Increased Local Farm Revenue

By creating a consistent wholesale purchasing channel, the initiative provides reliable income to small farms beyond farmers market sales.

2. Downtown Business Traffic

Locating the retail fridge inside The Beanery drives customers into the downtown corridor, increasing the likelihood of additional purchases at nearby businesses.

3. Retention of Seasonal Spending

Many seasonal residents bring food from urban areas. By offering convenient access to local products, we retain more food dollars within Aitkin County.

4. Agri-Tourism Development

Promoting farm events and producers directly within a downtown retail setting strengthens the connection between rural agricultural experiences and the downtown commercial district, reinforcing Aitkin County's identity as a local food destination.

Target audience:

- Seasonal property owners
- Families
- Health-conscious consumers

- Adults ages 20–40
- Visitors seeking authentic rural Minnesota food experiences

How many people usually attend this project/event? 25 people/ week

If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract? 250-400 people (May-August)

4. PROJECT BUDGET: in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Each Week	Total	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds
Ingredient			\$480	
Transportation	\$30	\$480		
Ingredients	\$144	\$2,304		\$2,304
To-Go Meal Prep	\$60	\$960	\$960	
Operations and Project Coordination	\$30	\$480	\$480	
Marketing & Promotion	\$5	\$120		\$80
Materials & Supplies	\$15	\$360		\$240
TOTALS	\$284	\$4,704	\$1920	\$2,624

Signature: *Kathryn Cassady*

Names: Kathryn Cassady, owner and food business contractor of Explore Healing Food and Movement in collaboration with Amanda Lowe, owner of The Beanery in Aitkin, MN

Date: 2/23/2026



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- Committee recommendations will be submitted to the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners for final approval.
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APPLICANT INFORMATION

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Event Name: Women Leading the Way 2026

Date(s) of Project/Event: 4/22/26

Location of Project/Event: The 40 Club Convention Center – Aitkin, MN

Organization/Community Name: American Peat Technology

Person in Charge of Project: Katrina Rutz

Organization Mailing Address (Street Name or P.O. Box or Route and Box # and City and Zip Code): 36203 350th Ave Aitkin, MN 56431

Contact Person's Phone #: 218-820-2009

Contact Person's Email: krutz@americanpeattech.com

Description/focus/purpose of your organization: American Peat Technology (APT), founded in 2003, is headquartered in Aitkin, Minnesota, where it manufactures high-value, natural peat-based products used in agriculture, water treatment, and consumer goods. As Minnesota's largest peat harvester, APT manages 480 permitted acres and operates two Aitkin-based manufacturing facilities totaling over 100,000 square feet, with approximately 43 year-round employees. The company is privately owned by 53 families, all with ties to Aitkin County.



Women Leading the Way is a grassroots community event organized and led by APT. Our team brings together valued community partners, including Riverwood Healthcare Center and the DAC of Aitkin, to support this critically important initiative. APT contributes both financial and in-kind support and actively engages other local businesses to invest in the event. The combined impact of APT's direct investment and the contributions of our community partners provides the funding necessary to make this event possible. Rooted in the company's core value of stewardship, the event reflects a commitment to investing in the long-term strength and vitality of Aitkin County. The organization's purpose is to create meaningful opportunities for women and girls of all ages to build confidence, foster leadership skills, and develop supportive connections across generations. *Women Leading the Way* operates on the belief that confident women contribute to stronger families, workplaces, and communities. Through intentional programming and community collaboration, the initiative aims to cultivate future leaders while reinforcing a culture of support, growth, and local engagement.

FUNDING:

Amount requested from Aitkin County	\$ 2,000.00
(Minimum \$100.00, maximum request is 2,000.00). The Economic Development Committee may recommend to the Board of Commissioners to increase or decrease the amount awarded at their discretion. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners grants the final approval for funding.	
Amount of your organization's match	\$ 12,479.00
Total projected budget	\$ <u>14,479.00</u>

PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION: Be concise and complete; attach supporting information if needed.

Women Leading the Way 2026 will be held on April 22, 2026, at the 40 Club Convention Center in Aitkin. The one-day event is designed to bring together approximately 180-200 women and girls from Aitkin County and surrounding communities for a day of connection, reflection, and leadership development. The program includes a keynote speaker, facilitated panel discussions, structured network opportunities, and community engagement activities focused on building confidence and personal growth. Grant funds will be used to offset venue and keynote speaker expenses, ensuring the continued sustainability and accessibility of the event. By attracting attendees from neighboring communities, supporting local venue and vendors, and generating proceeds for BIO Girls, a nonprofit dedicated to building confidence in adolescent girls, the event creates both immediate economic activity and long-term community impact. Women Leading the Way is designed not only as a single-day event, but as a recurring initiative that strengthens today's and the future workforce in Aitkin County through empowerment, connection, and sustained engagement.

What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.

Women Leading the Way is a one-day, multigenerational event designed to bring women and girls together to connect, reflect, and build confidence. In 2025, the event welcomed 180 attendees from Aitkin County and surrounding communities. In 2026, we project 180-200 attendees, with continued growth from neighboring counties. The event includes a keynote speaker, panel discussions, networking opportunities, and structured reflection activities designed to foster leadership development, personal growth, and community connection. Proceeds from the event support BIO Girls, a nonprofit organization focused on building confidence and self-esteem in adolescent girls. Grant funds will be used to offset venue expenses, speaker costs, and event materials, allowing the event to remain financially accessible while increasing regional marketing efforts to attract additional visitors to Aitkin County.

Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.

Women Leading the Way contributes directly to local economic activity by attracting attendees from across Aitkin County and neighboring communities. Participants utilize local restaurants, retail businesses, gas stations, and service providers before and after the event. The event is hosted at the 40 Club Convention Center, supporting a local venue and food service providers. With projected



attendance of up to 200 participants, the event generates measurable economic activity in a single day while also strengthening Aitkin County's reputation as a destination for leadership and community development events. By establishing this as an annual event, Women Leading the Way supports sustained tourism and recurring economic benefit for the region.

List target audience: Women Leading the Way is designed for women and girls of all ages and backgrounds throughout Aitkin County and surrounding communities. The target audience includes elementary, high school, and college students; young women entering the workforce; established professionals; business owners; healthcare and education leaders; nonprofit volunteers; and retirees. The event intentionally fosters multigenerational participation, creating meaningful connections between young girls, emerging leaders, and experienced professionals. By bringing together participants from both within Aitkin County and neighboring communities, the event supports regional engagement while contributing to local tourism and economic activity.

How many people usually attend this project/event? In 2025, we had 180 attendees.

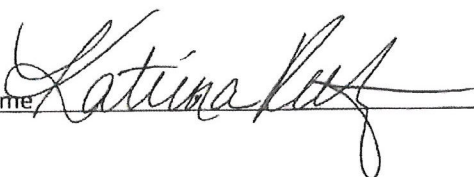
If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract? With enhanced regional marketing, we aim to increase attendance to 180-200 participants, including additional visitors from neighboring communities.

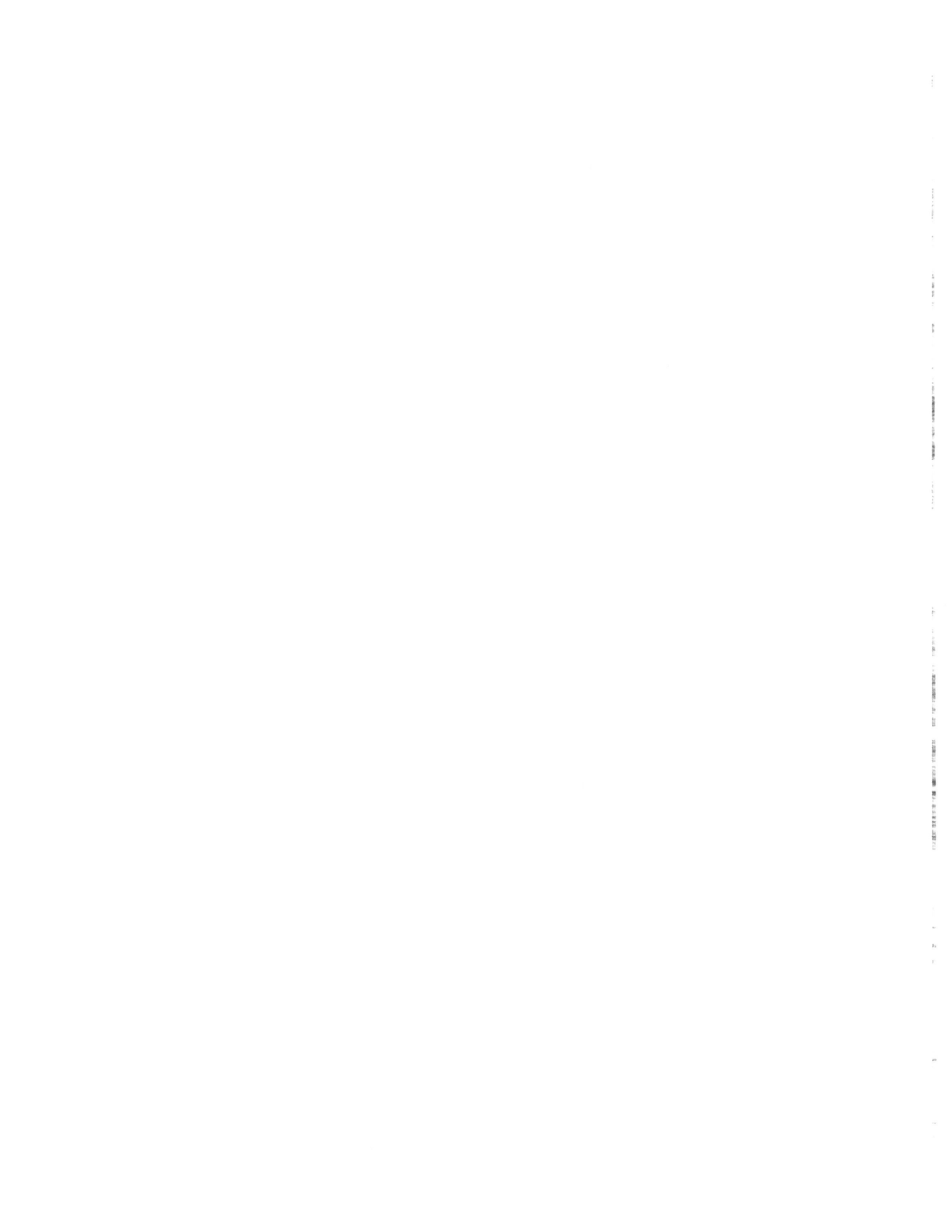
4. **PROJECT BUDGET:** in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
Venue & Food	\$1,200.00	\$6,961.00	\$8,161.00
Keynote Speaker	\$800.00	\$4,200.00	\$5,000.00
Sound Management	\$0	\$350.00	\$350.00
Lanyards	\$0	\$268.00	\$268.00
Programs	\$0	\$200.00	\$200.00
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$0	\$500.00	\$500.00
TOTALS	\$2,000.00	\$12,479.00	\$14,479.00

The requested \$2,000 will directly support venue rental and keynote speaker expenses, which represent the largest cost categories of the event. By offsetting these foundational expenses, grant funding helps ensure the continued sustainability and growth of the event while maintaining accessible ticket pricing for attendees.

Contact Signature:

Name  Date: 3/5/26





5

Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program January 1, 2026 - December 31, 2026

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APPLICANT INFORMATION

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Event Name: Petal & Leaf Nursery and Landscape (New signage)
Date(s) of Project/Event: April 2026
Location of Project/Event: McGregor, MN
Organization/Community Name: Petal & Leaf Nursery and Landscape
Person in Charge of Project: Andrea Bohn
Organization Mailing Address (Street Name or P.O. Box or Route and Box # and City and Zip Code):
45621 State Hwy 65 McGregor, MN 55760
P.O. Box 231
Contact Person's Phone #: 218-670-0629
Contact Person's Email: bohnandrea@icloud.com
Description/focus/purpose of your organization: Retail greenhouse/Landscape yard



FUNDING:

Amount requested from Aitkin County

\$2,000

(Minimum \$100.00, maximum request is 2,000.00). The Economic Development Committee may recommend to the Board of Commissioners to increase or decrease the amount awarded at their discretion. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners grants the final approval for funding.

Amount of your organization's match

\$2,000

Total projected budget

\$4,000

PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION: Be concise and complete; attach supporting information if needed.

Main Highway Signage - A professionally designed and installed roadside sign to increase visibility from Hwy 165 which will capture seasonal tourism traffic. Direct customers safely to the business and increase overall sales and community awareness

What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.

I hope to accomplish visible signage that helps direct customers to a business in the area. Glen sign design has professionally designed a sign that will be installed Spring of 2026.

Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.

Petal & Leaf will contribute to Aitkin County by: Attracting visitors and encouraging local shopping, support home gardening, offer educational workshops and partner with local schools and organizations.

List target audience:

Mixed ages & genders. assuming most of our clientele will consist of women of all ages of families looking to complete landscape needs.

How many people usually attend this project/event?

We are a new business. This is still unsure


If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract?

I would hope to bring in close to a thousand customers in the 2026 season.



4. PROJECT BUDGET: in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
New signage	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$4,000
TOTALS			

Contact Signature: 

Name Andrea Bohn Date: 2/21/2026

PETAL & LEAF NURSERY AND LANDSCAPE

Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program Application

February 16, 2026

Mark Jeffers

Aitkin County Board of Commissioners

Grant Application

Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program

Applicant- Andrea Bohn

Business Name- Petal & Leaf Nursery and Landscape

Location- McGregor, MN

County- Aitkin County

Amount Requested- \$2,000

Executive Summary

Petal & Leaf is a woman-owned retail greenhouse opening May 2, 2026, in McGregor, MN. The business will provide high quality flowers, vegetable plants, gardening supplies, and seasonal decor to residents and visitors of Aitkin County.

We are requesting \$2,000 to support startup marketing and signage expenses, specifically the installation of a visible and professionally designed highway sign, as well as interior greenhouse signage for pricing, product education and customer navigation.

These additions will increase visibility, attract tourism traffic, and strengthen the overall economic vitality of the McGregor area.

Business Description

Petal & Leaf is a locally owned greenhouse dedicated to serving the gardening and landscaping needs of both year-round residents and seasonal visitors. Products will include:

- Annual Flowers
- Vegetable and herb plants
- Hanging baskets and custom planters

- * Soil, fertilizer and planting supplies
- * Seasonal garden decor

As a small business in the Aitkin county community, Petal & Leaf is committed to community engagement, customer education, and supporting local growth.

Mission Statement

Petal & Leaf exists to cultivate beauty, sustainability and community by providing high quality plants and gardening resources while creating a welcoming space where residents and visitors can grow with confidence.

Purpose of Grant Funds

1. Main Highway Signage

A professionally designed and installed roadside sign to increase visibility from Highway 65. This will:

- * Capture seasonal tourism traffic
- * Direct customers safely to the business
- * Increase overall sales and community awareness

2. Interior Greenhouse Signage

Clear, attractive signage throughout the greenhouse for:

- * Product pricing
- * Plant care instructions
- * Promotional materials
- * Branding consistency

Effective signage is critical for customer experience, operational efficiency, and marketing success- particularly for a new business in a rural and tourism-driven area.

Community & Economic Impact

Petal & Leaf will contribute to Aitkin County by:

- * Attracting visitors and encouraging local shopping
- * Supporting home gardening and local food sustainability
- * Offering educational workshops
- * Partnerships with Local Schools and Organizations

Improved signage will directly increase business visibility, drawing in both residents and the many seasonal visitors who travel through the area each year.

Long-Term Sustainability

With strong community roots and a clear seasonal sales model, Petal & Leaf is positioned for steady growth. Strategic marketing and visible branding will establish the greenhouse as a recognizable and trusted destination within Aitkin County.

The requested grant funds will provide essential startup infrastructure that will support long-term revenue generation and business stability.