



NORTHLAND   
CONNECTION™

# WORK PLAN

2020

## ABOUT US

Northland Connection is the premier commercial real estate and economic development research program in the Northland. It aims to provide economic development data and analysis to recruit, expand, and retain businesses across the region. It powers responsive data services with a human touch and hosts the most curated regional commercial real estate database in Minnesota.

Since 1988, over a dozen partners have recognized the value of collaboration to promote economic development on a regional level. Program partners work together to recruit and retain businesses in the region and advance their collective understanding of the regional economy. The program has served as an incubator for numerous economic development initiatives, from moving regional sites toward shovel ready status to responding to new incentives such as opportunity zones and assisting with redevelopment of brownfield sites. It also provides foundational support for community profiles, strategic planning initiatives, and local and regional marketing efforts.

Northland Connection is a program powered by [The Northspan Group, Inc.](#) This program is in collaboration with our [private and public funding partners](#), commercial real estate, education, government, and regional & statewide economic development organizations. We engage and form partnerships to support the region we love and call home.

## OBJECTIVE

To provide economic development data and analysis assisting business recruitment, expansion, and retention efforts across the eight-county Northland region.

## TARGET MARKET

Northland Connection provides resources for community and economic development partners seeking property information, demographic or economic data, or connections to development resources in its eight-county service area. We support the work of our funding partners to grow the regional economy.

## INDICATOR

Northland Connection will support economic development efforts across the region. The data we provide will enhance business cases, strengthen applications, and enhance stakeholders' understanding of their communities' assets and challenges. This will help lead to an increase in economic activity across the region, diversification, and the ability to weather recessions and capitalize on economic growth.

## USERS INCLUDE:

- Cities
- Counties
- Nonprofits
- State & Federal Agencies
- Utilities
- Other Units of Government (e.g., Port Authorities, Airport Authorities, Regional Development Commissions)
- Private Businesses
- Developers
- Researchers
- Media

**PRIORITY ONE: Manage Program Operations**

GOAL 1. Manage the program resources for long-term financial stability

GOAL 2. Maintain and enhance program responsiveness and accountability to funding partners

**PRIORITY TWO: Conduct Regional Outreach**

GOAL 1. Market the program across the area it serves

GOAL 2. Strengthen regional cooperation

**PRIORITY THREE: Provide Research & Data Support for Partners**

GOAL 1. Compile the region's economic development assets

GOAL 2. Support activity for economic development professionals across the region

**PRIORITY FOUR: Sustain and update NorthlandConnection.com**

GOAL 1. Maintain accurate and up-to-date data and information on available properties, development resources, and the region

GOAL 2. Explore additional website upgrades as warranted

Structure for nesting priorities, goals, objectives & tactics on the following pages:



# 1

## MANAGE PROGRAM OPERATIONS

### a.

#### MANAGE THE PROGRAM RESOURCES FOR LONG-TERM FINANCIAL STABILITY

##### Provide program administration, including funding development and invoicing

1. Invoice partners on established timelines
2. Approach new potential members

##### Use program data to direct staff time and funding

1. Collect data on all inquiries for data and information directed to Northland Connection
2. Use data on program use to identify additional funding targets
3. Track requests for information to inform future investment decisions in website upgrades and data tools

### b.

#### MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE PROGRAM RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO FUNDING PARTNERS

##### Enhance program value through regular Advisory Committee meetings

1. Hold quarterly meetings with the Advisory Committee to provide program updates
2. Invite guest speakers or present Northland Connection original research at 3 of 4 Advisory Committee meetings

##### Provide members with regular program updates

1. Provide quarterly program usage report to interested funders who contribute \$5,000 or more to the program annually
2. Provide program updates in quarterly newsletter
3. Provide program updates between meetings and newsletters as necessary

##### Update program language to reflect member input and changes in regional economic development

1. Update the program's objective statement at 2020 Q1 Advisory Committee meeting
2. Share and revisit program guiding documents annually

## CONDUCT REGIONAL OUTREACH

2  
a.

### MARKET THE PROGRAM ACROSS THE AREA IT SERVES

#### Market Northland Connection using Northspan marketing channels

1. Provide at least one annual program update in the bi-monthly Northspan newsletter
2. Social media activity on Northspan Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts

#### Market improved functionality of development resource center

1. Market using Northspan marketing channels
2. Present on program to relevant partners such as SBDC consultants and the Entrepreneur Fund

b.

### STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION

#### Maintain and build relationships with communities and broader partnerships within the region

1. Meet and educate new staff members of Northland Connection partners or potential members
2. Organize six annual meetings among interested funders who contribute \$5,000 or more to the program annually
3. Work with Advisory Committee members to increase engagement within their communities when there is a perceived gap
4. Report on attendance at partner meetings such as the Iron Range Economic Alliance and the Minnesota Marketing Partnership
5. Available for attendance and presentations on Northland Connection at meetings related to economic development issues in partner communities

#### ii. Build connections among commercial real estate and economic development partners

1. Develop quarterly newsletter to provide market updates and share program information
2. Host 2-3 events such as property tours and networking opportunities for realtors and economic development professionals
3. Attend events and meetings across the region when deemed beneficial for program outreach

## PROVIDE RESEARCH & DATA SUPPORT FOR PARTNERS

3a.

### COMPILE THE REGION'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

#### Monitor trends in commercial real estate and economic development within the region and beyond

1. Share insights in quarterly newsletter, including potential op-eds when relevant
2. Use information to update website as warranted

#### Provide access to research and data visualization tools that help tell compelling stories about the Northland

1. Offer tools that enhance research capacity and data presentation such as Social Explorer and ArcGIS Online
2. Maintain knowledge of tools such as DEED and federal data sources and business databases such as AtoZDatabases

b.

### SUPPORT ACTIVITY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS ACROSS THE REGION

#### Assist with the use of Northland Connection resources

1. Provide rapid responses to requests for data and property information for funders and non-funders
2. Direct users to other sources of information that Northland Connection may lack

#### Assist program members with their projects that benefit from Northland Connection data and services

1. Support for initiatives valued by Advisory Committee members, such as initial conversations surrounding site shovel readiness and preparation for Fam Tours or tradeshow visits
2. Support partners' marketing efforts through background research, data provision, and assistance with creation of materials
3. Provide basic support for partner studies, projects, and grant applications that benefit from Northland Connection input or resources

#### Provide access to a suite of broader research services, both through the program for smaller requests and through separate contracts on larger requests

1. Customize packages of site and building locations
2. Qualify prospects and generate company profiles
3. Create demographic profiles of communities or trade areas

## SUSTAIN AND UPDATE NORTHLANDCONNECTION.COM

4  
a.

### MAINTAIN ACCURATE AND UP-TO-DATE DATA AND INFORMATION ON AVAILABLE PROPERTIES, DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, AND THE REGION

#### Maintain a regular schedule of outreach to realtors and property representatives to ensure property listings are up to date

1. Track updates from all realtors following an established schedule
2. Track systematic check-ins with communities

#### Maintain an up-to-date database of business development resources

1. Improve cataloguing of local incentives through upgraded development resource center
2. Maintain a regular schedule of outreach to individuals and organizations with listings in the database

#### Review and maintain narratives and information presented on the website

1. Track annual reviews of each page on the website
2. Coordinate updates to pages with relevant community partners

b.

### EXPLORE ADDITIONAL WEBSITE UPGRADES AS WARRANTED

#### Improve understanding of website analytics

1. Use Google Tag Manager to better track website usage
2. Explore possibilities to use tracked information for potential lead generation and include them in the usage report for interested funders who contribute \$5,000 or more to the program annually

#### Maintain relationship with Atlas Integrated for website support and industry trend updates

1. Check in with Atlas' Director of Software Services quarterly
2. Document any issues with the website and communicate them to appropriate support staff

#### Explore possibilities for improved presentation of information using new WordPress platform

1. Explore available widgets and tools
2. Solicit Advisory Committee feedback on potential changes and upgrades given capabilities and program budget

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

In order to streamline reporting, Northland Connection has developed several measures to show how it supports partners, both through staff work and through analytics from the website. The table below includes these measures; we present 2017-2019 data for additional context. We anticipate continued modest growth across all but one measure in 2020, which is reflective of Northland Connection efforts to build deeper relationships, position itself as a resource for regional partners, and marketing of the program. The one exception is in program overviews, where considerable staff turnover among partners led to an unusually high need for education of new staff in 2019; here, we anticipate a slightly lower figure, though we will continue to explore opportunities for additional program overviews.

### PROPERTY SEARCHES:

Number of times Northland Connection staff assisted individuals or organizations with a search for property information in the Northland Connection database. Note that these searches include only the instances in which Northland Connection was directly contacted, not all users of the website.

### DATA REQUESTS:

Number of times Northland Connection staff assisted individuals or organizations with a search for data on Northland demographics, economic data, business data, commercial real estate data, or other general regional information.

### MEETINGS ATTENDED/COORDINATED:

Number of times Northspan staff attended or coordinated a meeting as representatives of Northland Connection or its services.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEWS:

Number of times Northland Connection staff presented on the program, either to an audience or to partners. It is a subset of the "meetings attended/coordinated" category.

### AVERAGE MONTHLY USERS:

Monthly average number of website users over the course of the year.

### AVERAGE MONTHLY PAGEVIEWS:

Average number of pages viewed on the website per month over the course of the year.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES	2017	2018	2019	2020 GOAL
PROPERTY SEARCHES	31	22	27	30
DATA REQUESTS	53	33	47	50
MEETINGS ATTENDED/COORDINATED	51	34	36	40
PROGRAM OVERVIEWS	5	1	9	7
AVG. MONTHLY USERS	238	294	304	330
AVG. MONTHLY PAGEVIEWS	878	837	926	1,000

We will report on progress on each of these goals at each quarterly advisory committee meeting.





## PROPERTY DATABASE ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

### ADOPTED MARCH 2017

These standards aim to provide a clear picture of which properties can and cannot be listed in NorthlandConnection.com's property database. They seek to create a consistent standard for the entire region that aligns with Northland Connection Advisory Committee directives and supports Northland Connection's broader mission as it promotes new or expanded investment in the region's economy and the creation of well-paying jobs. The standards aim to balance a focus on the region's most valuable development properties and communities' desire to see vacant properties of any form redeveloped.

## PROPERTY DATABASE ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

### PROPOSED MARCH 19, 2020

**Objective:** These standards aim to provide a clear picture of which properties can and cannot be listed in NorthlandConnection.com's property database. They seek to create a consistent standard for the entire region that aligns with Northland Connection Advisory Committee directives and supports Northland Connection's broader objective as it provides economic development data and analysis assisting business recruitment, expansion, and retention efforts across the eight-county Northland region. The standards aim to balance a focus on the region's most valuable development properties and communities' desire to see vacant properties of any form redeveloped.

1. All undeveloped or vacant non-residential sites are eligible for inclusion in the database.
2. All industrial and office buildings are eligible.
3. Commercial retail buildings are eligible only if they include non-commercial uses such as office or warehouse space, or if they are vacant, large big box stores.
4. Even if they may theoretically be available for a different use, retail-only properties are not eligible unless an owner has made investments to convert it to a different use. For example, a former gas station may not be listed as an office building unless it has been renovated to remove gas tanks, pumps, etc.
5. Existing businesses that are for sale are not eligible (though the buildings themselves may be listed).
6. Northland Connection Advisory Committee members may request the addition of properties that do not meet the above criteria to the database.



## PROGRAM SOURCE OF FUNDS

The sources table indicates each member organization's 2019 contribution. Northland Connection received an additional \$3,000 in support for its website upgrade from one-time funding sources. We project a gap of \$12,352, which we will seek to close through recruitment of new members and one-time funding sources as they arise.

## PROPOSED 2020 SOURCES

NAME	AMOUNT	RESPRESENTATIVE(S)
Minnesota Power	\$25,000	Arik Forsman, Nancy Norr
Dept. of Iron Range Resources	\$20,000	Whitney Ridlon, Janelle Greschner, Ryan Malich, Jim Plummer
APEX	\$15,000	Matt Shermoen, Ian Vincent, Brian Hanson
DEDA	\$15,000	Chris Fleege, Adam Fulton, Ben Van Tassel
St. Louis County	\$5,000	Matthew Johnson
Duluth Seaway Port Authority	\$2,500	Kate Ferguson, Deb DeLuca
Carlton County EDA	\$2,500	Mary Finnegan, Brenda Nyberg
City of Cloquet	\$2,500	Holly Hansen
Fond du Lac	\$2,500	Jason Hollinday, Jamie Adams
City of Hermantown	\$2,500	Jim Mulder, Eric Johnson
Grand Rapids EDA	\$1,500	Rob Mattei
IEDC	\$1,500	Tamara Lowney
Koochiching County EDA	\$1,500	Paul Nevanen
Two Harbors EDA	\$1,000	Dan Walker, Jenn Sterbenz
<b>TOTAL 2019</b>	<b>\$105,500</b>	
<b>2020 EXPECTED COSTS</b>	<b>\$117,852</b>	
<b>2020 GAP</b>	<b>\$12,352</b>	



## PROGRAM USE OF FUNDS

The uses table shows expected 2020 costs. It reflects a modest increase relative to the 2019 budget and shifts resources away from one-time website upgrade expenses to more staff time to execute the new additions to the work plan. Our ability to complete all the new items will be contingent on efforts to fill the gap.

## PROPOSED 2020 USES

LINE ITEM	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL
<b>Personnel Costs</b>	<b>75,000</b>	<b>63.6</b>
<b>Operating Support</b>	<b>23,000</b>	<b>19.5</b>
<b>Website Content Management Software</b>	<b>12,000</b>	<b>10.2</b>
<b>Website Upgrade (final installment)</b>	<b>2,887</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>Travel Expenses</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Social Explorer</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Membership Dues (MN Marketing Partnership)</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Marketing</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>ArcGIS Online</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Cell Phone</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Meeting Expenses</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Printing</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Misc.</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Membership Dues (IREA)</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>117,852</b>	<b>100</b>



### SERVICES FOR LARGE FUNDERS

Northland Connection offers several value-add services for funders who contribute \$5,000 or more to the program annually.

These services include:

#### PROGRAM USAGE REPORT

While Northland Connection will report general website analytics to all funding members, we will also provide an enhanced report that provides additional insights targeted to partners with a regional reach. This report will highlight:

- Number and type of inquiries to the program
- Website analytics relevant to lead generation obtained using Google Tag Manager or other tools

#### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNER MEETINGS

Northland Connection believes that regular meetings among our wide range of economic development partners are valuable opportunities to share insights, leads, and plans and help bring partners together behind a common mission. To promote this exchange of information, Northland Connection will organize four annual meetings targeted at partners with regional reach. These meetings may be formal discussions or more casual networking opportunities based on partner availability and interest.

### NORTHLAND CONNECTION RESEARCH SERVICES

These services, including basic demographic analysis that packages information available on the website, come from Northspan subscription services or from external sources (DEED, US Census) and are available to all Northland Connection members **free of charge**. Within reasonable parameters, Northland Connection will also assist non-members who contact the program in search of information on sites or buildings within the criteria they identify, or in search of basic and readily available data. Data requests that require original research or extensive collection and interpretation of information require a separate contract. Barring other conflicts, staff can turn around these requests within one business day.



#### PROPERTY SEARCH: Research & Customize Packaging of Verified Site/Building Locations

- Review NC.com database for sites/buildings matching client requirements
- Review results with area brokers to verify data and availability of properties; research new information requested by client
- Package real estate options per client requirements
- Package site/building profile packet, including matrix and support materials

#### PROSPECT QUALIFICATION: Research & Customize Packaging of Snapshot of Company Specific Profiles

- Company Name, Headquarters Location, Founded, Description, Products or Service, Governance, Financial Information (if available), Industry, NAICS,
- Number of Employees,
- Address, Telephone, Email and Website
- Verify data from other sources
- Package snapshot profile

#### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

- Available both within the Northland and in other locations across the nation, from neighborhoods to entire regions
- Demographics; Personal, Disposable, and Household Income; Retail Market Analysis; Census and American Community Survey Statistics; Labor Market Information; Leading Employers; Regional Industries; Utility Rates and Capacities
- Available both within the Northland and in other locations across the nation, from neighborhoods to entire regions
- Demographics; Personal, Disposable, and Household Income; Retail Market Analysis; Census and American Community Survey Statistics; Labor Market Information; Leading Employers; Regional Industries; Utility Rates and Capacities
- Package response per client's wishes

**NORTHSPAN RESEARCH SERVICES**

The following services are not included in within Northland Connection but are available to all members and partners for an additional fee.

# N O R T H S P A N

## ArcGIS Online Property Profiles

In Fall 2018, Northland Connection added ArcGIS Online (AGO) to its offerings. AGO is a state-of-the-art visualization tool used by major media outlets to combine graphics and text to tell stories. It gives Northspan basic mapping capabilities and the ability to create Story Maps, or scrolling, visually appealing media that can profile properties, projects, or otherwise highlight assets and opportunities in communities we serve.

Approximate cost is \$1,000 for a single profile. Multi-property portals available at a negotiated rate based on number of properties.

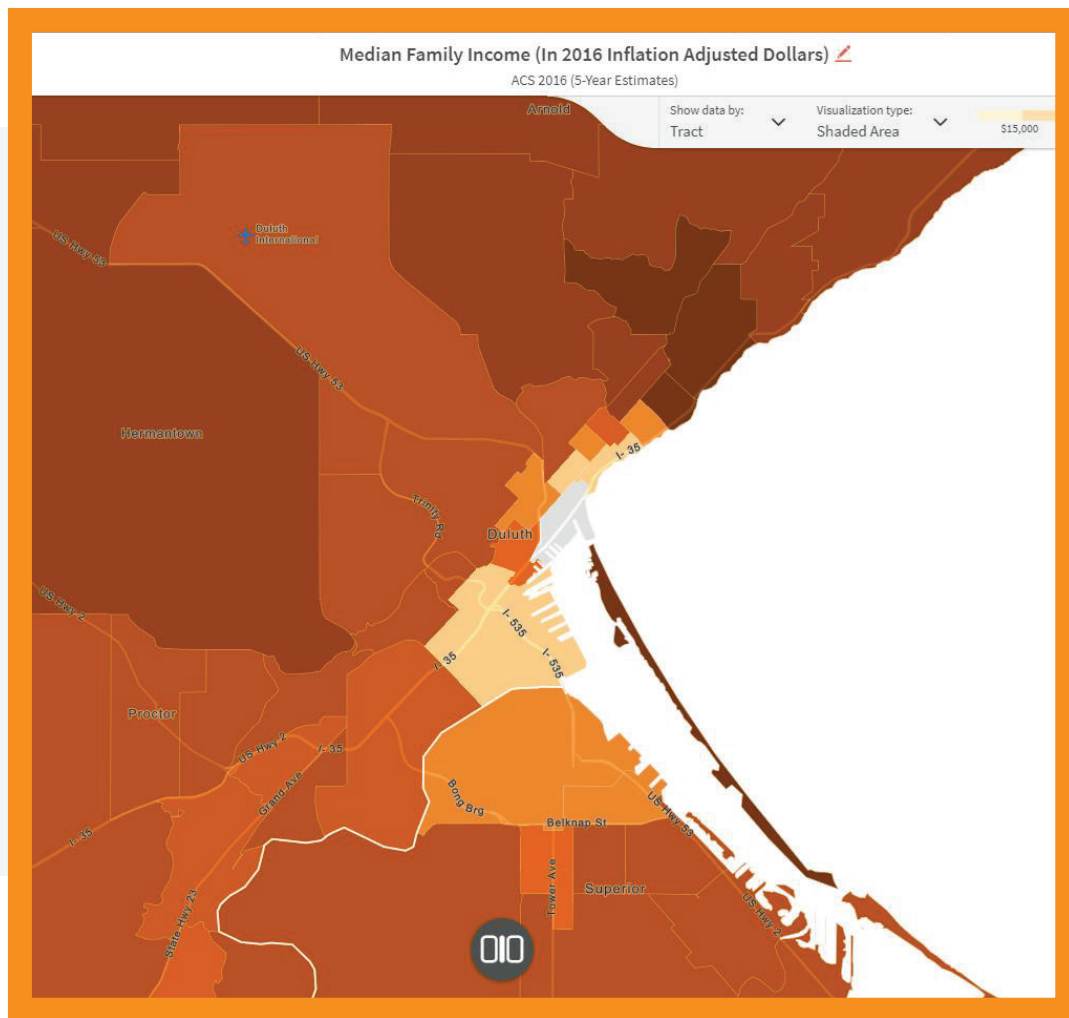


## NORTHSPAN RESEARCH SERVICES, CONTINUED

## Social Explorer Map Development

Northspan can create maps visualizing current and historical demographics using Social Explorer. These maps can be comparative, and they can also be inserted into AGO Story Maps for enhanced visual appeal.

Approximate cost is \$500 for basic map; terms negotiable for multiple maps or more elaborate projects.



**NORTHSPAN RESEARCH SERVICES, CONTINUED**

**Detailed Prospect Qualification**

**\$300-500**

- Everything included in a snapshot profile listed on previous page.
- Leadership Team, Markets, Partners/Investors, Competitors, Recent News, Unique Information (i.e. feedstocks for biofuel company), SWOT Analysis (if available), imagery
- Compilation of data on businesses within certain sectors within a defined area, including details on NAICS codes, revenue, number of employees, and contact information
- Package a detailed profile

**Industry or Cluster Analysis**

**Depends on scope**

Regional presence, national or global analysis, financial information

Outlook, external drivers, supply chain, major markets, market share concentration and host of variables for more than 700 industry sectors

Package response per client's direction

**Pre-Shovel Ready Analysis**

**\$1,500-2,000**

Assess site's viability for DEED or other Shovel Ready program

Initial review of materials necessary for application

Provide checklist of needed materials

**Real Estate Market Studies**

**\$1,000-2,500, depending on scope**

Assessments of commercial and residential vacancy rates, absorption/capture rates, and rents within defined areas

Research tailored to specific projects or of an overall market area as a whole

Can include broad community assessments or parcel-by-parcel data collection

Policy/program recommendations available upon request



**NORTHSPAN RESEARCH SERVICES, CONTINUED**

**Economic Impact Analysis**

**Depends on scope**

- Assessment of economic impact of a business or industry on a defined area
- Basic version (\$1,500-2,500) analyzes impact using internal data and/or operating assumptions
- Advanced version (\$4,000-6,000) includes IMPLAN economic impact software package for data on direct, indirect, and induced effects

**Financial Feasibility Studies**

**Depends on scope**

- Develop a report assessing the financial feasibility of a business or industry
- Interrogation of underlying assumptions of business model
- Optional inclusion of economic impact analysis
- Development of narrative tailored to key partners

**Marketing Materials Development**

**\$2,000+**

- Provision of data and narratives for profiles of communities, properties, or programs
- Available to assist with design

**Website Content Development and Project Management**

**Depends on scope**

- Provision of data and narratives for community or regional website development
- Available to work with web developers on design and construction of website to ensure user-friendliness for both website users and future updates to the website
- Depends on scope

**Other Project-Specific Activities**

- Staff is available to perform other projects, which may include but is not limited to:
  - Cataloging and analyzing** development potential of vacant or foreclosed properties
  - Developing an industry referral database** of regional businesses seeking other business opportunities
  - Other research needs** as brought forward by partners