

**National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation
2008 Annual Training Conference
October 3 – 7, 2008**

**NADO Research Foundation
400 N. Capitol St., NW, Ste 390
Washington, DC 20001**

**Denali Project Number:
392-08**

**Grant Period:
April 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009**

**Date Submitted:
January 6, 2009**

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Name of Project: NADO's 2008 Annual Training Conference, October 3 – 7, 2008

Grantee Name: NADO Research Foundation

Project Director: Laurie Thompson

Denali Project Number: 392-08

Denali Grant Amount: \$25,000

Project:

The purpose of the Investment was to provide support to the NADO Research Foundation to provide training for executive staff, board members and program staff from regional development organizations during NADO's 2008 Annual Training Conference: *North to the Future*. The conference was held in Anchorage, Alaska, October 3 – 7, 2008.

The training event offered a setting for economic development professionals, local government officials and other key stakeholders to share best, promising and noteworthy practices; access to professional economic developers; discussions on emerging industry trends; tours of notable development projects; and promote peer networking and information exchanges. The overall goal of the training is to help attendees better manage their regional economic development organizations.

Thirty-four of the conference attendees were from Alaska. Funds from the Denali Commission helped bring 17 of them to the conference.

During the conference, a group of 100 participants went on a mobile workshop to learn about the economic impact the Seward Highway national Scenic Byway has on the region. As part of the tour, the group visited the Girdwood community center and library, a project made possible in part through a Denali Commission financial investment.

How Sponsorship Met/Enhanced the Denali Commission's Mission:

The conference offered sessions that addressed regional strategies for economic development and specific topics related to professional development and organizational enhancement. The conference included peer exchanges, best practices and other professional training for regional development organizations. Specifically, it provided training to executive leadership and staff of regional development organizations and others engaged in rural development to help them enhance their capacities to manage programs that bring economic strength and success to their regions, particularly rural and distressed communities. The combination of peer exchanges/best and noteworthy practices with industry experts afforded opportunities for attendees to learn about strategies and approaches that may be replicated in their regions as they strive to resolve community and economic development challenges.

How Sponsorship Benefitted the Denali Commission:

A portion of the funds requested were used to help cover costs for individuals from Alaska to attend the national conference, individuals who might not have otherwise been able to attend. Assistance was made to individuals who are currently working to strengthen their communities with support from the Denali Commission and the training and information they received during the conference was beneficial to the overall success of their Denali investments.

We planned various mobile workshops aimed at showcasing successful community and economic development initiatives, including a visit to the Girdwood Community Center, a Denali funded project.

Federal Co-chair George Canelos spoke at the conference during the opening panel discussion, *Shaping the Public Sector Role in Regional Development*. We were honored that he committed time to attend the event and shared his insights and expertise about community and economic development in rural and distressed areas with the attendees.

We convened a panel of representatives the Denali Commission, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Delta Regional Authority that was attended by stakeholders of these regions and other areas that are currently under consideration for or exploring similar federal commissions. This convening provided a forum for participants to learn from each other about federal commission – regional development organization relationships, share ideas, exchange information and best practices

A plenary session also addressed and highlighted various projects in Alaska that are noteworthy and of interest to regional development organizations in the Lower 48; the sessions was titled *Alaska Innovations Present Promise for the Lower 48*. Denali Commission sponsorship covered this panel as well.

How Funds Were Used:

Support was requested for curriculum development, session coordination, tours of successful investments in Alaska and other activities necessary to ensure the success of the proposed investment. In addition, the funds provided assistance for several representatives of economic development organizations who would not otherwise be able to attend the training event. None of the funds requested were used for staff time.

Conference Attendees:

Over 700 community and economic development professions serving primary rural and small metropolitan regions attended the conference. Much of the audience came from the Lower 48 where they serve rural and distressed communities. The bulk of attendees were representatives – board, executive directors and program staff – from regional development organizations (known as economic development districts, economic development councils, regional planning commissions, council of governments and a host of other names, but all serve

multi-jurisdictional regions). The board members who attended were typically local elected and appointed officials.

Problems Encountered:

The only problem experienced was that we were not able to expend all of the Denali grant funds, so therefore did not request a full drawdown. The primary reason for this situation was that airfare and other expenses related to bringing them to the conference were less than planned. Once this was realized, offers were extended to other organizations to send representatives, but we still did not spend the entire amount awarded.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

NADO's Annual Training Conference is a proven valuable program for its members and others engaged in rural development. NADO will continue to offer the conference annually.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

By all accounts the conference was valuable to all participants. Initial feedback was extremely favorable for the venue (Alaska) and content, especially the nine mobile workshops that were offered throughout the conference.