



Village of Valemount

Work Plan for Economic Recovery Funding

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Executive Summary

On July 22, 2024, the Municipality of Jasper and the surrounding area was evacuated due to wildfires. Highway 16 from British Columbia through Jasper National Park along with Highway 93 south to the Icefields were immediately closed to all commercial and tourist traffic. The Village of Valemount saw its main connective highways closed during its peak operating season, almost 20,000 evacuees compared to its population of 1,050, and the village's commercial activity cut off.

With highway closures out of the village's control, loss of revenue for Valemount tourism businesses was estimated at up to \$1,929,200 and was self-reported by 64 businesses, tourism and not, at over \$2.2M. Many businesses in Valemount are cyclical and rely on strong summer revenues, leaving them now in a precarious financial position. As part of its economic recovery efforts, the Village of Valemount along with Strategies North Advisory Inc. conducted multiple engagements, surveys, and discussions to gauge the losses and recovery needs. Of 64 local businesses surveyed, 97% experienced a reduction in revenue during wildfire closures, with almost 30% indicating that they experienced a reduction in revenue of 81-100%. Due to the reduction in revenue, 70% of businesses indicated they do not have sufficient resources to cover their expenses and remain viable without support.

The village has been lobbying the B.C. government for \$1.5 million in financial support, to be distributed to local businesses through an independent third party organization. This amount was determined through the significant community engagement conducted and is less than both reported and estimated revenue losses. It has been identified as a critically needed amount that local businesses and organizations can use to keep operations going through to the next operating season and prevent a downward economic spiral in the community.

This document outlines a work plan to address the urgent recovery needs of Valemount's business community, currently insufficiently met by available funding programs. A targeted approach is proposed, with a dedicated \$1,500,000 recovery funding program to be administered by an independent third party organization to ensure objective, transparent, and accountable distribution. With third parties already identified and engaged, the Village of Valemount is well prepared to have future committed funding administered to businesses efficiently with suitable guidelines and reporting requirements to ensure funds can be allocated effectively.

This plan acknowledges the unique circumstances of the indirect effects of the 2024 Jasper Wildfires on the Village of Valemount and outlines a pathway for successful support. Once immediate recovery needs are met, the village is well positioned to capitalize on a variety of future economic development growth opportunities.

Objectives

Secure Targeted Recovery Funding: Obtain dedicated funding (\$1,500,000) from the BC Government to address Valemount's specific economic recovery needs, able to be accessed by Valemount businesses. Funds are intended to prevent business closures and job losses.

Establish Independent and Accountable Fund Administration: Utilize a recognized third-party organization to manage the administration and distribution of funds, ensuring objectivity and adherence to developed guidelines. Funding received to also include amounts to cover the costs for administration, separate from the \$1.5M.

New Program Development: Work with the government and third party organization to create clear guidelines for the Valemount business community, outlining eligibility criteria, reporting requirements, and funding parameters. Funding to be accessible as a program Valemount business organizations can apply to.

Independent Application and Review Process: The third party organization to develop and implement an accessible and efficient application process, followed by application review and approval. The application process is hoped to be as accessible as possible, so that all local businesses who need support will be able to apply. Valemount will not participate in the approval process to maintain independence.

Timely Disbursement and Suitable Reporting: Disbursement of funds without delay to approved businesses, with the third party working with unapproved applications to try to get them to an approved state while funding is available. Reporting requirements designed to ensure accountability and audit compliance, without being overly burdensome on approved businesses.

Work Plan

	Activities	Description	People Involved
1	Ongoing Discussions with BC Government	Valemount will continue discussions with the BC Government regarding recovery needs, emphasizing that current available programming does not adequately address these needs and support is critical to maintain the community.	Village of Valemount, BC Government (EMCR, JEDI, other), Strategies North Advisory

2	Funding Commitment	The BC Government will commit \$1,500,000 in recovery funding, plus associated third-party administrative costs to the recovery initiative.	BC Government (EMCR, JEDI, other)
3	Third-Party Organization Selection	Valemount will continue discussions with Community Futures, Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT), and Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) to finalize selection of the organization to administer the funds. Selection will consider BC Government preferences, organizational ability and capacity, and local familiarity.	Village of Valemount, CF, NDIT, CBT
4	Funding Guidelines Development	The selected third-party organization, with input from Valemount, will develop and share funding guidelines to be distributed among the Valemount business community. These guidelines will include funding maximums, required documentation, eligible expenses, application forms, reporting requirements, and application deadlines. Funding guidelines will be developed to maximize efficiency of funding received within the community.	CF/NDIT/CBT, Village of Valemount
5	Application Submission	Guidelines and application forms will be shared among the local business community, and businesses will prepare and submit applications to the selected third-party organization.	Village of Valemount, Valemount businesses, CF/NDIT/CBT
6	Application Review	The third-party organization will independently review applications, without Valemount's input, for approvals, rejections, or required edits.	CF/NDIT/CBT, Valemount businesses (for application edits)

7	Application Approval	The third-party organization will approve applications that meet the established requirements and guidelines, within the total program budget.	CF/NDIT/CBT
8	Funding Disbursement	Funding agreements signed with businesses with approved applications, funding is disbursed.	CF/NDIT/CBT, Valemount businesses
9	Reporting and Audit Compliance	Per funding agreements, approved businesses will submit required reporting to the third-party organization, including materials necessary to meet audit requirements and show appropriate use of funds.	Valemount businesses, CF/NDIT/CBT
10	Program End	Funding program application deadline has passed accepting no other applications and/or funding is all disbursed. Village of Valemount to work with the third-party organization to report on the impact to the community. Specific Valemount business information obtained during the application process to remain confidential from Valemount.	Village of Valemount, CF/NDIT/CBT

Key Considerations

- This plan is rooted in the clear and demonstrable need for targeted funding that is not met by existing programs.
- Open and consistent communication will be maintained with the BC Government, the selected third-party organization, and the Valemount business community.
- An independent third party organization must control and administer the funds, for transparency, objectivity, and adherence to municipal legislation.

- Community Futures, NDIT, and CBT, have all indicated in discussions with Valemount that they are available to administer potential funding received. The Valemount business community is most familiar with Community Futures, and as such is Valemount's preference. Discussions with Community Futures indicate capacity and ability to expediently get started.
- Funding guidelines, application process, and approval process will be followed to meet reporting and audit compliance.
- Funds are hoped to prevent the worst of the negative effects from the decrease in revenue and economic activity during the highway closures including business curtailments and job loss. Eligible costs under the funding program therefore may include payroll expenses, utilities, business rent/lease payments, insurance, and inventory. Funding levels under the program should be based on metrics such as the amount of revenue lost and number of local jobs maintained or gained.
- This plan is designed to be able to quickly deploy the urgently needed funds to the Valemount business community, once received.

Further Growth Initiatives

With immediate recovery needs addressed, the Village of Valemount can turn focus to future growth and resilience-building initiatives. In discussions with Northern Development Initiative Trust, NDIT has indicated that they will support a skills building and NDIT-funding workshop in the community with Tourism Valemount as a leading organization. Local businesses will be able to attend the workshop, building skills and receiving training in financial management, marketing, and operations. NDIT will also work with businesses to go over its available funding programs that they can utilize. The Village of Valemount will continue working with Community Futures and Columbia Basin Trust for their input and additions in the workshop. Further with Columbia Basin Trust, CBT has indicated it has project funding available for growth activities. The Village of Valemount, in collaboration with Tourism Valemount, will utilize this opportunity following the NDIT workshop to develop new marketing strategies and materials. This project with CBT will help develop broader community appeal and capacity, as individual businesses also build their capacity in tandem.

In conversations with Destination BC, while Destination BC does not currently have direct funding it did indicate other ways it can support the village's future growth. This included potentially increasing its inclusion in the Invest in Iconics Strategy to improve Valemount's presence provincially, nationally, and internationally as a top destination. Tourism Valemount will continue to work with the visitor services team, and Destination BC has indicated a desire for increased contact with the organization. In 2026, new opportunities

such as the Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program will be available. In partnership with multiple communities in BC including Simpcw First Nation, other First Nations, and other municipalities, the village can access this upcoming funding to faster progress broader regional tourism efforts it is planning such as a multi-community tourism circuit.

Valemount will continue to collaborate with the town of Jasper, particularly in the intermediate term as Jasper is also recovering. Valement strengthening its tourism, local investment, and economic development as Jasper does the same can benefit both communities by increasing the size of the pie when it comes to tourism visitation. The village will also further community-to-community work with other neighbouring community partners including Simpcw First Nation and Lheidli T'enneh First Nation.

While doing the above, Valemount will soon develop a local economic strategy as well as a tourism strategy leveraging the recovery funding providing necessary stability to pursue future growth opportunities. Recovery support will also help non-tourism businesses, as Valemount will explore ways to build contacts to increase community investment, diversify its local economy, and strengthen other industries such as manufacturing, construction, agriculture, technology, or others as identified in the economic development strategy. Valemount is currently undertaking and will continue to undertake and grow local events, buy local and workforce development programs, and infrastructure development with the aim of bringing tourists to the village and spurring economic activity. To assist with these goals, the village will explore funding programs offered by PacifiCan, NDIT, JEDI, and other sources.

Building on the foundation laid by successful recovery efforts, the Village of Valemount will look to re-establish its local Chamber of Commerce by identifying and working with stakeholders in the community with a desire for the Chamber to succeed and an ability to help it do so. The Valemount Chamber of Commerce will help empower the business community and strengthen them in looking at ways to develop partnerships, find synergies, and build local capacity and long-term economic resilience.

Conclusion

This proposed work plan offers a clear and structured solution to address Valemount's unique economic recovery needs. Establishing a framework and ensuring independent administration, recovery funding support can meet community needs not met by current funding programs and can contribute to the region's economic resilience. Once current recovery needs are met, the Village of Valemount is well positioned to work with partners and develop its capacity to invigorate future economic development.