

PRELIMINARY APPLICATION TO THE ESTHER B. KAHN FOUNDATION BY VOSH INTERNATIONAL

VOSH INTERNATIONAL (Volunteer Optometric Services To Humanity, hereinafter referred to as "VOSH") and VOSH of New England ("VOSH ONE"), respectfully submit the following Preliminary Application to the Esther B. Kahn Foundation:

1. Description of VOSH INTERNATIONAL and VOSH of New England

VOSH INTERNATIONAL (VOSH) is a nonsectarian and apolitical non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to facilitate provision of vision care worldwide where it is not affordable or obtainable. VOSH serves as a coordinating body to **(34 regional chapters and 25 schools of optometry)** approximately 50 affiliated VOSH chapters and 3000 members worldwide. VOSH chapters, such as VOSH of New England, **(may be)** are comprised of multidisciplinary teams of optometrists, opticians, ophthalmologists, medical personnel, and trained laypersons who provide eye and low vision care at clinics worldwide during short-term missions **which have long term effect.** Chapters plan, coordinate and fund their own unique eye care mission. Depending on need, VOSH members donate time, experience, resources, optometric equipment **and** supplies, **and** education to those who have no other resources or access to eye care. Additionally, VOSH has set up clinics to serve disaster areas including Bosnia, El Salvador, Honduras, Houston, **India** and New Orleans. In addition VOSH has helped establish permanent eye clinics in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti and Mexico.

On December 6, 2001, VOSH signed a declaration with the World Council of Optometry and the World Health Organization to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020. VOSH's objective is to improve people's vision so they can be more productive and enjoy a better quality of life. As part of our commitment to this goal, VOSH is actively engaged in the development of sustainable, accessible and affordable eye-care clinics in countries where the provision of eye care is non-existent or severely limited. That is, eye clinics that will sustain themselves long after VOSH volunteers leave a country. However, without training, education and modern, functioning optometric equipment and supplies, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish optometric labs or workshops, or promote financial sustainability and responsibility.

VOSH is governed by a Board of Directors and several advisors, none of who receive compensation for their services. VOSH has no staff and functions without a payroll. The budget is "bare bones", with no single major donor

(until a recent donation from one donor for a specific project in Nicaragua). Despite these odds, VOSH averages about **70 to 80 eyecare** medical missions annually, serving over 100,000 people by providing new and recycled eyeglasses, treating eye disease and referring or performing eye surgery.

2. Project Description and Need

The concept of establishing self-sufficient eye clinics and **enhancing optometric education** optometry schools in developing countries is a concept that has been embraced by the vision industry in recent years and it is only now, with collaborative efforts and a sharing of resources, becoming a reality. Using the funds sought by this grant request, VOSH hopes to assist developing countries by providing essential infrastructure, such as diagnostic equipment and training, to create sustainable eye care clinics which would, in turn, empower local eye care providers, resulting in quality health care to those who can not afford it.

VOSH is seeking funds to purchase, collect and ship new or used optometric equipment, supplies and educational materials to schools and non-profit clinics in developing countries. Provision of basic diagnostic equipment to be used by health care personnel in developing countries will increase accessibility and sustainability of basic eye care services to needy people.

VOSH has an excellent track record indicating that it can accomplish these goals with proper funding. For example, in the late 1990's, starting with an idea by VOSH visionaries and in collaboration with a local Salvadorian philanthropic group, VOSH helped to establish FUDEM, a non-profit foundation located in El Salvador, dedicated to treating visual health in rural and poor areas. With local funding, coupled with training by VOSH volunteers, VOSH helped FUDEM grow from an idea into the largest non-profit eye care clinic in Central America. VOSH volunteers continue to assist, educate and train at those clinics. Also, VOSH helped to establish, equip and train students at the **new** College of Optometry at the University of El Salvador.

Similarly, VOSH is actively working toward establishing a sustainable clinic in Nicaragua. VOSH is currently working with the Nicaraguan government and local interest groups to establish the physical location of a clinic and addressing important local issues. VOSH is also looking to work within other countries, such as Honduras, to establish sustainable clinics.

In 2007, VOSH went through a complicated and expensive process resulting in the collection and shipping of a container of equipment to an optometric

school in Ghana, Africa. The school is now in the process of assembling the equipment to be used in training. VOSH is also in discussions with optometry schools in Peru and Argentina to provide them with enough instrumentation to train them to conduct proficient eye exams.

As a result of the Ghana effort, VOSH learned that it needed to develop and implement a more efficient and cost effective system of collecting and transferring optometric equipment. Consequently, VOSH recently developed the Technology Transfer Program (TTP), an endeavor to provide a place for corporate and individual donors to contribute new or used optometric equipment for educational institutions and clinics in developing countries. Provision of used equipment will enhance patient care in these clinics by providing reasonably up-to-date equipment that otherwise may be discarded. In connection with the TTP, VOSH Illinois is collaborating with the Student-VOSH Chapter of the Illinois Optometric College, wherein optometrists donate their time after graduation to train and educate personnel in clinics established by VOSH, using the equipment VOSH has shipped.

Through TTP, VOSH envisions sending, as a package, all the equipment necessary to create a complete eye examination station (aka a "lane"). To send equipment piecemeal does not achieve the goal of promoting a sustainable eye clinic or school.

Accordingly, VOSH has compiled a detailed list of diagnostic equipment comprising one complete examination lane necessary to teach future optometrists or to sustain an eye clinic in a developing country. The list of approximately 15 items includes **(include)** an examination chair, an equipment stand, a slit lamp biomicroscope for examining the various eye structures, a projector to project letter charts on a wall, a tonometer to measure eye pressure, a hand held ophthalmoscope for looking at the back of the eye, special ophthalmoscope with hand held lenses for examining the eye with a dilated pupil, portable eyeglass lenses and trial frame for determining eye glass prescriptions, and a phoropter for determining refractive error.

A lane would be comprised of new or used equipment or a combination thereof. Obviously, collecting used equipment would be the most cost effective approach. However, used equipment cannot be shipped directly to the clinics unless it is cleaned, repaired and operational. Anticipating this, under TTP, VOSH has collaborated with International Medical Equipment Collaborative (IMEC), a non-profit organization located in North Andover, MA, that collects, repairs, and cleans donated equipment free of charge to VOSH at its warehouse. (IMEC has its own sources of funding unrelated to

VOSH.) However, a major financial obstacle for VOSH is the cost to ship the equipment from the donor to IMEC. (Once it reaches IMEC, IMEC has its own funding to ship to the recipient clinics.) VOSH has no funding available to pay the cost to ship donated equipment to IMEC, and to date, donors have not been willing to bear that cost.

One further shortcoming of the "used equipment" approach is that it has been difficult to collect all the used equipment necessary to comprise a complete lane, and shipping an incomplete lane is not helpful to create sustainable clinics. One viable solution is to combine donated equipment with newly purchased equipment in order to create a complete and useful examination lane.

Thus, the funds from this grant, if awarded to VOSH, would be used for shipping used equipment to IMEC as well as the purchase of new equipment or a combination thereof necessary to sustain optometric schools or clinics in a developing country. A \$25,000 grant to VOSH could (1) pay for the cost of shipping domestically to IMEC, enough equipment to outfit 10 or 15 examination rooms in optometry schools or non-profit clinics in developing countries, or (2) buy several lanes of new equipment and pay international shipping costs directly to the clinics or (3) a combination thereof. In order to accomplish the goal of creating a full lane of equipment needed to assist a school or eye clinic, and to be most cost effective, VOSH envisions implementing a combination of all of the foregoing depending on the type and extent of donations.

The establishment and continuation of just one working sustainable eye clinic in either Nicaragua or El Salvador would be a measure of success of VOSH's efforts to create sustainable clinics in underdeveloped countries and to educate the local personnel to provide professional and effective eye care. VOSH contemplates assisting in establishing many schools and clinics through TTP. The vision, drive and manpower exist; we simply need the funding to assist in completing this goal.