



# Alaska Workshop Review

## *Fellow Reflections and Insights*

### Overview

The [Arctic Resilient Communities Youth Fellowship \(ARCYF\)](#) held the inaugural in-person gathering – the Alaska Workshop – in Anchorage, Alaska, March 25-31, 2023. Twenty fellows from remote regions of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland participated in a weeklong immersive experience where they connected, shared knowledge, and bonded through skill-building activities. This was the first of three in-person gatherings (‘workshops’) during the nine-month fellowship.

Initiated thanks to funding from Global Affairs Canada, the weeklong gathering brought together 20 of the 21 fellows—see the full list of the 2023 ARCYF cohort along with brief biographies [here](#)—to supplement their regular online training through in-person meetings on a range of Arctic issues with leading global experts of various backgrounds, including academia, Indigenous organizations, businesses, Arctic communities, governmental entities, and non-governmental organizations.

The first two days were filled with educational excursions to [Alaska Pacific University \(APU\)](#), the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium \(ANTHC\)](#), and the [Alaska Native Heritage Center \(ANHC\)](#). Fellows then engaged with other youth organizations at the Arctic Youth Forum hosted by the [NANA Corporation](#), where they developed pitches on policy ideas that they later shared with policy makers at the [Arctic Encounter Symposium \(AES\)](#), where the last three days of the workshop were held.

This is a review—informed by several group debriefs, a questionnaire and in-person interviews—provides reflections on their experience, recommendations for future gatherings and techniques for improved youth engagement.

## Fellow Reflections and Insights

The fellows provided the following observations with the understanding that the aim of the ARCYF and other youth initiatives is to improve the quality of the interaction. Emphasis was placed on the importance of having gatherings designed and led by youth, the value of fellowship through meals and promotion of safe and inclusive dialogue.

- Youth engagement efforts must be made inclusive and representative of all young people by creating safe places for youth to talk.
- Youth participation and engagement in leadership programs increases when youth are presented with the opportunity from a trusted source.
- Youth engagement is only successful if the knowledge shared by youth is recognized and accredited.
- Youth represent the power of new perspectives – new stories equal new opportunities.
- “Nothing about us, without us,” reflecting a need for Indigenous voices when acting within Indigenous spaces.
- Indigenous knowledge is a science; Indigenous science plays key role in community health and has helped Indigenous peoples thrive for thousands of years.
- Indigenous economics involves a mutual reliance, prioritization of help, and egalitarian care that makes sure everyone is taken care of. A whole community effort is needed.
- Food teaches values, makes people stewards of the land, and keeps communities involved with nature and their land.
- Participating in sessions is good; leading sessions is even better!

## Key Recommendations

Lessons learned and feedback garnered from the inaugural Alaska Workshop are being accounted for and incorporated into the planning for the upcoming Canada and Greenland workshops as well as future Alaska workshops.

- Use the first fellows' group as guides for the next cohort of fellows and seek to incorporate the fellows in planning activities.
- Schedule more breaks in between activities—fellows felt as if there were just too many events and not enough decompression time.
- Give fellows more time to bond with each other and more free time to explore Anchorage. Opportunities to engage with other youth is a prized activity.
- Youth experience is enhanced when fellows are put in a leadership role; many fellows would rather actively lead discussions rather than passively listen. Placing fellows in roles where they are at the forefront should be a top priority for future workshops.
- For future cohorts, focus initial workshop on relationship building/group dynamics, and reserve attendance at conferences for later workshops

## Alaska Workshop Recap

The following section provides day-by-day detail on the ‘Alaska Workshop’ activities and feedback provided by the fellows.

### Friday, March 24 and Saturday, March 25 – Fellows Arrive and Settle In

Over the course of the weekend, the fellows arrived in Anchorage, Alaska after traveling from widespread locations. For several fellows, this was their first trip outside of their home countries. Fellows were met at the airport and shuttled to the hotel, the Extended Stay America on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and A Street. Fellows were given time to shop and explore the city, and a group dinner for those present in Anchorage was held at Bear Tooth Pizza.

### Sunday, March 26 – Initial Briefing and Introductions

Fellows continued to arrive to Anchorage throughout the day. The fellows who were already in Anchorage formally met one another and were provided with breakfast and lunch during an initial meeting to review the coming week’s events and discuss expectations. Following lunch, fellows had a few hours of free time before a group outing to Arctic Valley Ski Area, where the group took part in a fun afternoon of snow tubing. The scenic drive to and from the mountain provided views of the city of Anchorage and Cook Inlet, which the fellows greatly enjoyed. Dinner was served at the house of Isaacs, where fellows continued to connect with one another.

### Monday, March 27—Internal Workshop and Exploring Anchorage

The fellows attended a morning ARCYF workshop at APU led by Bray, Castellanos, and Isaacs, with a focus on youth empowerment and engagement. The session was extremely productive and ended up being much more collaborative and youth-led than expected. Talking points from the session included:

- Youth represents the power of new perspectives- new stories equal new opportunities.
- Goals of the fellows as they look forward to their personal projects included: The preservation of cultural values, giving youth the opportunity to talk and have their voice heard, responsible resource development, the exploration of how to make youth engagement more effective, the promotion and vitalization of Indigenous languages, the acknowledgement of Indigenous Knowledge and its value, the incorporation of Indigenous health into Western viewpoints (specifically pertaining to the viewing land health as part of community health; heavy tie-in with climate change), and discussing the issue of mental health in native communities—referring most urgently to high levels of suicide in these communities, especially in Greenland.
- Fellows spoke of the challenge of engaging in discussions surrounding their community: Many times, youth do not know where to start and how they fit into the conversation. Third parties can help them by presenting different paths and guiding them to platforms where their voices will be heard and welcomed.

- Challenges in this regard include traveling thousands of miles to speak about your home, and a lack of Indigenous young men participating in youth forums like these, which means that the whole community is not being represented.
- Important to advertise programs interested in working with Indigenous youth to sources who have preexisting relationships and connections with youth; most youth learn about programs from a trusted source rather than finding them independently. One given example of this would be to reach out to rural high schools; especially if you want a younger perspective.
- Youth engagement has failed when youth share their knowledge and are not recognized. As an addendum to this point, it is important that youth are aware of the value of what you know and are compensated for this knowledge.
  - Some of the fellows shared personal experiences of academics or other speakers approaching them with kindness and subsequently passing off their personal experiences in presentations without accreditation. Fellows expressed the idea of “nothing about us, without us,” reflecting a need for Indigenous voices when acting within Indigenous spaces.
- Youth engagement efforts must be made inclusive and representative of all young people by creating safe places for youth to talk; in workshops and symposiums there should always be a third-party to protect Indigenous youth.

Following this ARCYF workshop, the group heard presentations over lunch from the President of APU, Janelle Vanasse, and the university’s Indigenous Engagement Coordinator Karli Tyance Hassell, who spoke about APU’s mission and the work that the university is doing with Indigenous communities. Following this presentation, the fellows were shuttled to ANTHC, where the group met with Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer, Director of Climate Initiatives, as well as Max Neale and Tristan Morgan of the ANTHC Center for Environmentally Threatened Communities. This presentation focused on the number of communities in Alaska that are threatened by climate change, and the challenges in finding solutions. It was also a good example of the ways that Indigenous health has been codified into operational structures and how Indigenous health in Alaska is defined by more than personal physical health. It extends as well to the health of the community and the land, which must be equally protected and nurtured. The educational program of the day was completed by a trip to the Alaska Native Heritage Center, where fellows were given a tour of the museum and grounds and learned more about the distinct architecture and cultures of Alaska Natives across the state.

Fellows were then driven to dinner, served at the house of former Alaska Lieutenant Governor Mead Treadwell, where Alaska Native leader Willie Hensley discussed his trailblazing work for Alaska Natives in the early days of statehood and his central role in shaping ANCSA and the ICC. Following this event, the day concluded, and the fellows were driven back to the hotel.

## **Tuesday, March 28—Collaboration with Fellow Youth Groups**

The fellows participated in the Arctic Youth Forum at NANA, an event held in conjunction with Arctic Youth Ambassadors (AYA) and Arctic Youth Network (AYN). The day was completely youth led, and the management team had little to no influence over the topics discussed and the course of conversation. The positive discussion featured the fellows mixing with members of the other youth organizations and sitting in small breakout groups, where the groups came up with policy ideas and pitches. Talking points from the session included:

- Liberation, breaking free from rigid structure; the general idea that communities are healthy when left to their own devices.
- Indigenous knowledge is a science; Indigenous science plays key role in community health and has helped Indigenous peoples thrive for thousands of years. For future generations to have access to this knowledge, this science must be passed down by being centered within schools and other knowledge centers.
- Indigenous economics involves a mutual reliance, prioritization of help, and egalitarian care that makes sure everyone is taken care of. A whole community effort is needed.
- As the underpinning and foundation, food teaches values, makes people stewards of the land, and keeps communities involved with nature and their land.

Some sample pitches included:

- Integrate knowledge of Indigenous people of the land into the education system and make mandatory the integration of indigenous knowledge into policy as a form of science.
- “Free Trade Policy for the Security of Arctic Foods,” a project which allows indigenous foods to be traded freely within circumpolar communities to establish a better food security resource. Allow access to different foods (for example, Alaskans could gain access to agricultural output that they don’t currently have access to).

Fellows indicated that Youth Workshop was one of the highlights of the trip. Fellows enjoyed working with different youth groups and being able to lead the conversation.

Tuesday’s evening event was at the Alaska Airlines Reception, held at the Alaska Airlines Hangar close to the airport. The reception featured Alaska Airlines “Salmon Thirty Salmon” plane, which was open for exploration; fellows enjoyed this light-hearted occasion.

## **Wednesday, March 29 through Friday, March 31—Days at AES**

Fellows attended the Arctic Encounter Symposium (AES), held all three days at the Dena’ina Center in downtown Anchorage. The symposium was well attended by many Arctic dignitaries, including U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski, Senior Arctic Ambassadors from the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Greenland, various business leaders, and numerous academics.

The ARCYF administrative team received many complimentary evaluations about the fellows' participation and activities from these dignitaries, many of whom expressed an interest in connecting further with fellows and seemed extremely receptive to incorporating youth voices into their respective programs. A full list of 2023 AES participants and panel sessions, of which fellows were able to self-select sessions from the [2023 Arctic Encounter Symposium Agenda](#).

Of note throughout the three days, the dinner function on Wednesday night consisted of the Arctic Youth Reception, a networking function held in partnership with Arctic Youth Network and Arctic Youth Ambassadors at the Captain Cook Hotel. This event was an opportunity for the fellows to meet with speakers and panelists of the AES conference, many of whom attended the reception. Additionally, the fellows were granted an audience with Senator Murkowski on Friday morning, where they were able to discuss policy pitches with the Senator; fellows were pleased with Murkowski's engagement and felt she was receptive to youth voices.

### **Friday, March 31—ARCYF Debrief**

Following the conclusion of AES, the fellows met for an informal 'debrief' to share their observations and suggestions. The takeaways from the debriefing included the following:

- Fellows appreciated the opportunity to participate in ARCYF, and acknowledged it went farther (in meaning and learning) than other programs some have participated in. They look forward to offering feedback and getting involved in co-creation of content.
- Fellows felt that the preponderance of receptions without subsequent dinners resulted in a lack of substantial food—they were always snacking, never eating. Fellows would have enjoyed spending more time together, getting to know each other and building relationships. One idea to address both of these concerns is to hold daily debriefing dinners with only the fellows present. Fellows were also disappointed with the quality of the food at AES, which provided the lunches on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.
- Fellows reported that it was easy to become overwhelmed, particularly during AES, and felt that there was a lack of safe places for conversations, with the Wednesday night Youth Reception discussed as an example of this problem. Fellows requested more youth meetings and receptions just for youth, or advice beforehand if people other than the youth participated in the meetings.
- Fellows appreciated the Sunday morning meeting but would have liked expectations for the week to have been outlined even more explicitly and perhaps ahead of their arrival.
- Use the first fellows' group as guides for the next cohort of fellows. It is vital to the success of the program that the feedback gained this year is incorporated into next year's planning. When possible, some fellows expressed interest in assisting with the planning, which could involve collaboration with the group of 2023 fellows to better plan for future fellows or engaging with future fellows to plan for themselves.
- Schedule more breaks in between activities—due to a variety of factors, including inadequate food, lack of hydration, and trouble with jet lag/sleep after long travel, many of the fellows reported feelings of fatigue, especially by the end of the week. While material accommodations can easily be improved, it is important to remedy the temporal

constraints of the Workshop as well—fellows felt as if there were just too many events. More free time and strategically scheduling workshops and presentations rather than filling days with educational opportunities would improve fellows’ creativity and productivity in dialogues.

- Give fellows more time to bond with each other and more free time to explore Anchorage, a city which many of them had never visited. Even those who had previously visited the city, expressed interest in this as well, so that they could have acted as ‘tour guides.’

### **Saturday, April 1 and Sunday, April 2—Departing Anchorage**

Many of the fellows departed soon after the Alaska Workshop week concluded; some had later flights and were able to do final shopping and exploring in Anchorage before their departure.

## Engagement Opportunities

Integral of the immersive approach to the Alaska Workshop, ARCYF is grateful to the following for their time to personally engage with the fellows.

- Janelle Vanasse, President, Alaska Pacific University
- Karli Tyance Hassell, Indigenous Engagement Coordinator, Alaska Pacific University
- Aaron Leggett, President of the Native Village of Eklutna
- Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer, Director of Climate Initiatives, ANTHC
- Max Neale and Tristan Agnauraq Morgan, ANTHC Center for Environmentally Threatened Communities
- Michelle Trefon, Cultural Program Manager, Alaska Native Heritage Center
- William L. “Willie” Hensley, Author of [Fifty Miles From Tomorrow](#)
- Senator Lisa Murkowski

## Support Team

ARCYPF is a collaborative project, and the Alaska Workshop was only made possible with members of its team that provided programmatic and logistical support.

### Institute of the North

- Jon Isaacs, Board Chairman
- Ian Laing, Executive Director
- Hanna Eklund, Program Coordinator

### North Star Group

- Francesca Bray, ARCYF Project Manager
- Amy Sparck, Director of Advocacy
- Karl Ohls, Senior Policy Advisor
- Quentin Powers, Intern
- Veronica Slajer, Principal Advisor

### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Gilbert Castellanos, International Affairs Specialist

## Partners

ARCYPF builds strategically on the results of the Arctic Council’s Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group’s [Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Arctic Mining](#) (MBAM) initiative. ARCYF was initiated, and is being implemented, by [Institute of the North](#) and [North Star Group](#) in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and with support from [Global Affairs Canada](#), Greenland School of Minerals and Petroleum, and the [Denali Commission](#).



The Alaska Workshop was made possible thanks to support from local Alaska businesses and organizations including:

- Alaska Airlines
- Denali Commission
- Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association
- NANA Regional Corporation
- Northwest Strategies

Additional partners are invited to join visionary supporters in empowering emerging Arctic leaders. As a contributor, you will be invited to speak at one of our seminars or assist fellows with their personal projects. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact [info@arcyf.org](mailto:info@arcyf.org).