Middle Kuskokwim Gathering

Empowering Community

November 6 – 9, 2024 | Aniak, Alaska

MEETING SUMMARY

Quyana – Dogidinh

to everyone who participated:

Middle Kuskokwim Elders, Youth, Tribes & Communities

TKC Shareholders & Leadership

Partners & Presenters

Culture Bearers

Youth Dance Group

Our Aniak Hosts

2024 Middle Kuskokwim Gathering

Empowering Communities Nov 6 – 9, 2024

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Executive Summary

MEETING ACTIVITIES

We traveled up and down the Kuskokwim over our 4-Day Gathering. The journey included:

Meeting Agreements – We decided to be present, hold a safe space for conversations, and move towards solutions together.

Presentations – Words shared by YKHC, AVCP Health Families Program, Tribal Clean Energy, TCC, Deerstone Consulting, and TKC gave us information to consider. We took that knowledge and turned it into calls for action.

Our Culture – From our youth dances to our circle exercise to the laughs shared and stories told, we all felt the connection between our villages and our connection to our culture.

Together As One – While we all came from different villages, we made decisions as one Middle Kuskokwim.

Meeting Goals and Intent

- Share healing
- Map out our future
- Put ideas into action

MK Communities

Lower Kalskag
Upper Kalskag
Aniak
Chuathbaluk
Napaimute
Crooked Creek
Georgetown
Red Devil
Sleetmute
Stony River

Presentation Partners

AVCP Healthy Families Program
Cody Pequeño
Deerstone Consulting
TCC Tribal Government & Client Services
TKC
Tribal Clean Energy
YKHC

Facilitators

Agnew::Beck

Funder

TKC

STRENGTHS OF THE GATHERING

We determined that our collective voice is powerful. By coming together as one Middle Kuskokwim region, we acknowledge that our voice could be louder, our resources greater, and our presence known to regional, state, federal, and international partners.

We established that we own the solutions. Our region has many challenges, but we focused on finding our own way out of the mud.

TOOLS GUIDING US FORWARD

Taskforces to move our region's challenges towards solutions.

A **regional cooperative agreement**, so we can speak as one.

"Everyone takes care of everyone – that's how we fix our future. If we lead with love."

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Below is a high-level summary of many presentations, activities, and discussions over the 4-day gathering.

"We aren't staying stuck in the mud – we're walking out of it onto the top of the riverbank."

Challenges

Our Way of Being

- Yuuyaraq, our way of being, is becoming more challenging to live and pass on to our children. From fishing restrictions to climate change, mental health crises to outmigration.

Our Sovereignty

- We often feel left behind or forgotten. When regional, state, private, and federal partners make choices that impact our region, it can be difficult to create solutions or find resources to overcome the challenges.

Solutions

1. Taskforces

Locally led taskforces can help us address our pressing challenges. These areas were voted highest priority:

- Food security
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Cultural wellness and education

2. Regional Cooperative Agreement

A Regional Cooperative can help us collectively bring awareness, advocacy, and resources to our region.

Next Steps

1. Have First Taskforce Meeting

Establish taskforce members, then convene the taskforces to determine their composition, purpose, frequency, and process.

2. Bring Information Back to Villages

Participants will share information about the taskforces and potential regional cooperative agreement with community members, to see if there is regional support for these solutions.

Potential Partners

Partners in the MK

- Cities
- School district
- TKC
- Tribes
- Youth (e.g., students)

Additional Partners

- AFN
- AVCP
- Businesses
- Calista
- Organizations in villages
- YKHC

2024 Middle Kuskokwim Gathering: **Empowering Community**

Welcome & Coming Together

INTRODUCTIONS

Blessing & Welcoming Remarks

- *"Very good to see young kids yuraqing and learning. Very proud of them"* – Bruce Morgan, Aniak Traditional Council
- *"Thank you for holding this gathering. It is so good to see everyone again."* – Lenore Kameroff, City of Aniak
- *"Hardly any of us are from one village. We all grew up up and down the river."* – Jonathan Samuelson, The Kuskokwim Corporation

Meeting Agreements

- In every chair, a leader
- Safe space for meaningful conversation
- Value our time together – be present/engaged
- Move toward solutions
- Take care of yourself and others

New to Gathering in 2024

- Youth at the summit.
- Space for more dialogue and fewer presentations.
- Solution-oriented taskforces.
- Discussions on a cooperative agreement.

2024 GATHERING AGENDA

- **Wednesday, Nov 6** – Welcome
- **Thursday, Nov 7** – Health & Wellness
- **Friday, Nov 8** – Identifying Solutions for Our Region
- **Saturday, Nov 9** – Next Steps & Getting Out of the Mud

Aniak Yuraq Group performed to open the Gathering and for the morning grounding. Group led by Audrey Leary.

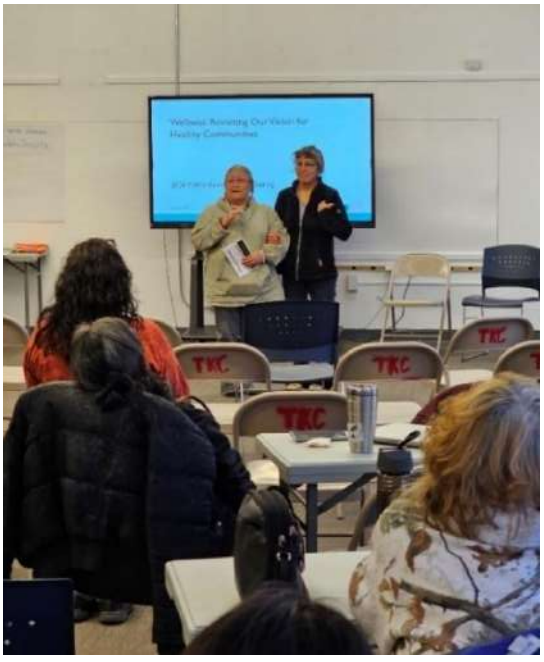
Health & Wellness

DISCUSSION: REFLECTING ON CHANGES OVER THE LAST YEAR

Participants reflected on how the region defined health at the 2023 Gathering, displayed to the right. This reflection included a discussion on what has changed since the last Gathering:

At the 2023 MKG Gathering, participants identified the above as needed for a healthy community. Word size indicates the frequency of mention. Image generated on Wordart.com.

- **New Approaches at YKHC:** New comment form the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation.
- **Continued challenges with medical travel:** Many are still missing appointments at YKHC and in Anchorage due to travel challenges (e.g., canceled flights, late flights). Group wants to explore options to alleviate issues, especially for Elders traveling.
- **Issues in the Bering Sea impacting subsistence:** Trawlers in the ocean negatively impact the environment where fish grow up. Concern that salmon are being targeted and killing off our way of life.
- **Decrease in subsistence fishing:** Subsistence has changed and the harvest numbers have gone down significantly. People are not catching enough fish to survive off of in winter.
- **More youth cultural programming:** Cultural camps in the Native Villages of Napaimute and Kalskag brought youth from 10 villages and TKC shareholders from outside the region to teach Yuuyaraq to the youth.
- **New first aid/CPR/AED instructor**: Program can travel to villages and do those trainings at the request of the village. We currently have one instructor, but we are looking to expand to two.
- **Initiated a First Responders Program:** One theme from the last gathering was creating a first responders program in each village. We had the first meeting in January 2024 but had low attendance. Tried again in May or June, but having a hard time getting traction. Continuing to work with our villages directly.



When we ask for these things to happen, we have to show up. We can't expect someone else to do this work for our communities. We have to show up to the own things or own agendas that we're setting.

YURAQ TO "YOU AND ME AND ME AND YOU"

Song Composed by Cody Pequeño, Esther Friday, and Mairlee Tuluk

Facilitator Cody Pequeño from Chevak led a yuraq to a song composed by him and his aunties. Throughout the four days of the Gathering, participants enjoyed listening to the song and yuraqing, together.

PRESENTATION: AVCP HEALTHY FAMILIES PROGRAM

Presenters: Elsie Smith (Yuktaq) Lead Facilitator; Hilda Nicholai (Nanugaq) Family Services Specialist; Kimberly Mute (Qassayuli) Prevention Unit Manager

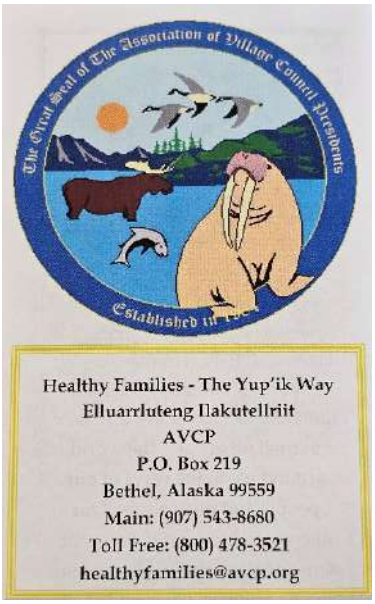
Originating in 2008, the AVCP "Healthy Families" program is a series of workshops designed to promote healing by connecting participants with Yup'ik, Cup'ik, and Athabascan values. Elders from around the region, including the late Peter Jacobs, developed the framework called Elluarrluteng Ilakutellriit for the program and continue to play a major role by imparting wisdom about family, resilience, and traditional ways of life.

Presenters Elsie, Hilda, and Kimberly shared personal stories about their connection with Elluarrluteng Ilakutellriit and the importance of knowing traditional values to establish a strong sense of identity and belonging. Through these teachings, participants learn to overcome challenges, build self-esteem through service, and reconnect with the values of sharing and giving. Gender roles, life skills, and the importance of understanding emotions and relationships, showing love through actions, and cultivating patience and forgiveness serve as tools for personal and communal growth. The initiative not only strengthens cultural ties but also fosters practical approaches to navigating modern challenges while preserving the essence of Yup'ik, Cup'ik, and Athabascan identity.

The below graphic developed by the AVCP Healthy Families Program conveys "the vision of Elluarluteng Ilakutellriit; a whole health framework that illustrates traditional practices, values, and beliefs through the human lifecycle as told by Elders from around the region and the late Peter Jacobs" (AVCP 2024). Learn more at https://www.avcp.org/healthy-families-workshops/.

Questions for the Health Family Presenters

1. "If an individual person wanted to do your sessions, how would they go about signing up?"
    a. They could email us or call us, and we have them fill out a registration form.
    b. Priority is given to Tribal citizens and OCS-referred individuals.
    c. Our program would pay you to go to Bethel, including a hotel room and food, for all three days
2. Is there an age limit?
    a. Because it includes three days of sitting, we prefer the age to be 16 and up. Have gone as low as 13, but it can be a hard time sitting still because most of the workshop includes Elders sharing.
3. Does the individual have to be enrolled in a compacted Tribe?
    a. No, it does not matter; they just need to be a Tribal citizen.
4. Does the Tribal member need to be in the region, say they're in Anchorage and want to participate?
    a. Two workshops are held in Anchorage every year.



PRESENTATION: YKHC

Presenters: Susan Wheeler, Vice President of Hospital Services; Adrienne Gregory, YKHC Director of Behavioral Health; Fredrick Wheeler, YKHC Deputy Director of Travel and Medicaid Services; Chase Alexie, YKHC Medicaid Prior Authorization Supervisor; Russell Pollock, YKHC Capital Projects Director; William "Chet" Ford, YKHC Itinerant Program Coordinator; Sarah Desjardins, Mental Health Provider

Employees from YKHC gave updates on the progress of corporation goals. Much of the presentation was question-based and can be located in Appendix D on page 47.

Construction Initiatives – Russell Pollack

There are six ongoing projects in villages: three are currently in the construction phase, and three are in the design phase. In Bethel, there are two projects under both construction and design:

- New Staff Housing: This project addresses the critical housing shortage in Bethel.
- Community Health Service Building Renovation: This renovation project is underway to improve the facilities.

In addition, Bethel has a project in the design phase:

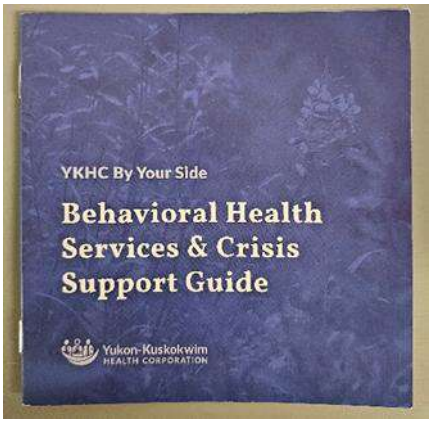
- Materials Management Warehouse Addition: The project is progressing toward 95% design completion, with 100% Construction Documents anticipated by the end of the year. Construction for this project is expected to begin in the fall of 2025.

YKHC Travel

YKHC currently handles over 8,500 travel requests. Unfortunately, two-thirds are canceled or rescheduled because of weather, creating significant problems for the region. The team has worked on making progress since last year:

1. The team added a customer care weather team member to help with travel challenges. People in the region can call 833- 543-6625.
2. Working with a travel care group to help free up pressure on village staff. One challenge is that people were unfamiliar with the travel care group's name when they called. Worked with GCI users so it will now say YKHC when the travel care group calls.

Aniak Behavioral Health



Since the Gathering last year:

- Sarah is the new staff member at the Aniak Subregional Clinic. Goal was to try and make communication more accessible in the region, so now people can call the subregional clinic for support.
- We are looking to start up a grief group at the church here.
- YKHC listened to the participants and created new behavior health booklets.
- There is a new Behavioral Health Administrator – Adrienne Gregory.

Current challenges include:

3. Staffing in Bethel is low. Hard to retain staff.
4. Because of low staffing, it currently takes about 45 days to get scheduled for an assessment. When a referral comes in, YKHC has started to do triages with referrals and determine if someone has a high need and if they get in right away. Try to get them in within 7 days.
5. We also follow up with everyone on the wait list once a week to ensure their level of need has not changed.
6. We do not have any behavioral health aides in villages represented here. If anyone is interested, reach out to the 800 number. The goal is to have at least one behavioral health aid and zero suicide.

Current efforts include:

7. We are focusing on increasing the number of behavioral health aides. At the beginning of 2024, we had four to five. We now have 14 and are looking to open six more positions.
8. Summer community needs assessments are opportunities for behavioral health aides to understand the needs of the communities. For example, through their community assessment, Holy Cross decided they wanted to have a presentation about the impacts of alcohol abuse.
9. Working to decrease the number of temporary employees. The hospital is fully staffed with almost all non-temporary employees. YKHC also clarified that temporary staff are not compensated more than other staff when considering benefits, even if their dollar per hour is higher.

Itinerant Program

YKHC Itinerant Physician Assistants (PAs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) provide primary health care, emergency care, and more to patients at village clinics in the YK. They work under the supervision of the Medical Director and are committed to YKHC's mission of improving community health. In general, there is a high number of these NPs and PAs itinerant visits compared to the region as a whole, and the reason is that the clinics are unstaffed. Ways the program is looking to improve services include:

- Looking into a localized medivac service like LifeMed. They are flying in a caravan and doing ramp transfers. This is quicker than flying a jet directly to Anchorage. We are looking to train Medivac as our first line of defense responders to direct travel as needed.
- Balancing trying to grow the department and to grow the number of health aides
- For 2023, there were no outpatient providers for women's health, now to 21 in 2024. By the end of 2024, it will probably be about the same for itinerant providers.
- If we hire an office assistant in a village, we will train them in ETT and CPR so that communities will at least have someone who can perform first response.
- Helping staff with tutoring to take the TABE test.

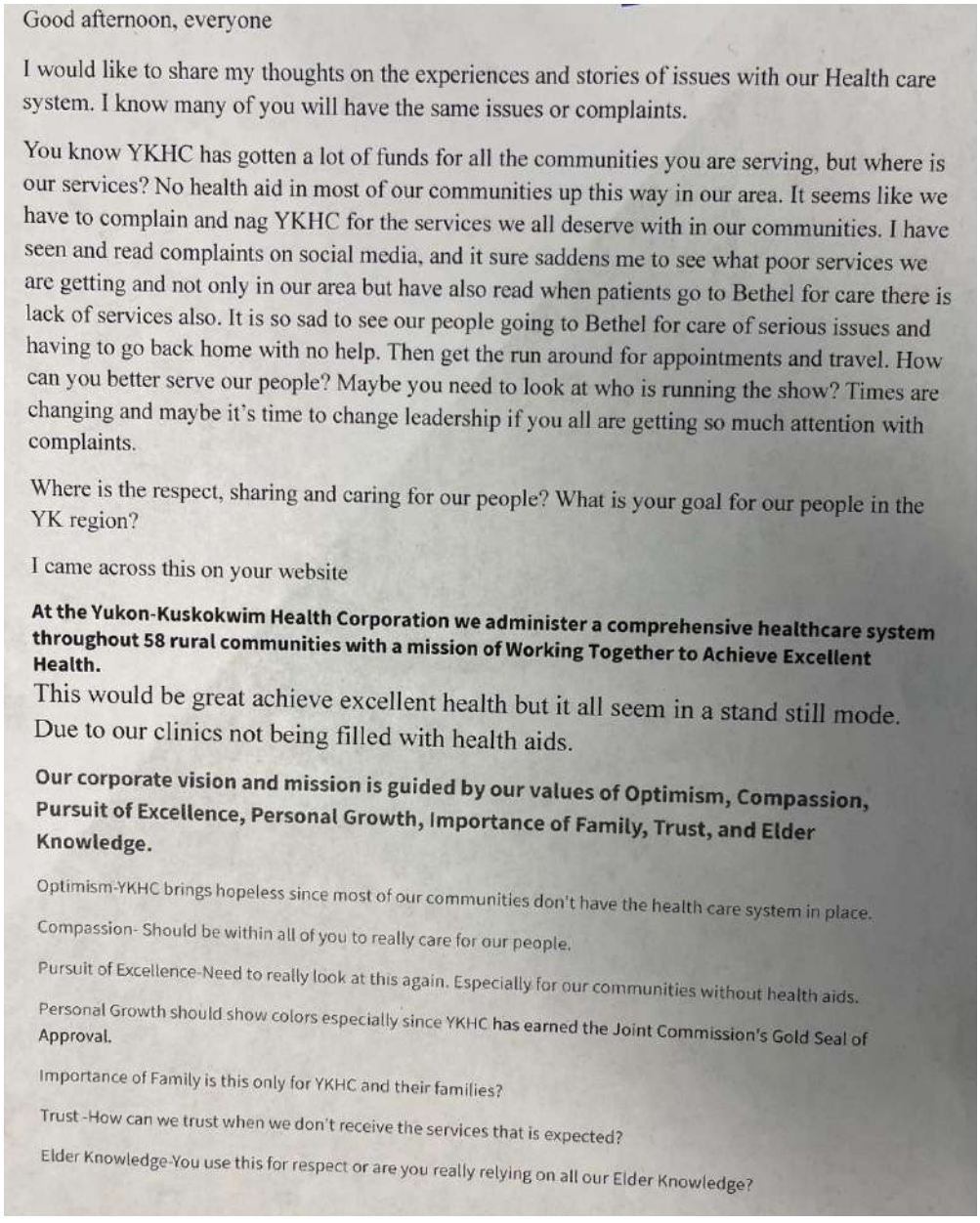
Questions from the Region

Participants asked many great questions regarding workforce challenges, missing services in the region, travel issues, and care expectations. There were concerns about miscommunication between YKHC staff and those seeking care, heavy burdens on families due to travel complications, and recommendations for services that could help with efficiency. For a complete list of questions, see Appendix D on page 47.

Prepared Thoughts from the Region

Jolene, a youth representative from Chuathbaluk, was asked to share the following on behalf of her community. Jolene's message was powerful and echoed concerns shared by the region.

Members of the YKHC replied that they did not have a great response, but that when they hear those complaints, they take them to heart. YKHC develops a list of goals every year. The corporation does not always achieve these goals, but they are trying their best, and they are trying to be transparent. One proposed solution is to continue to try and hire local health aides in the villages so that there is a more direct line between the community and YKHC. The region wants to brainstorm ways to make it easier for youth to become health aides, potentially making the math portion more accessible in ways that make sense to their everyday lives. Additionally, YKHC mentioned that meeting more often with village leaders may help keep the community better informed.



Good afternoon, everyone

I would like to share my thoughts on the experiences and stories of issues with our Health care system. I know many of you will have the same issues or complaints.

You know YKHC has gotten a lot of funds for all the communities you are serving, but where is our services? No health aid in most of our communities up this way in our area. It seems like we have to complain and nag YKHC for the services we all deserve with in our communities. I have seen and read complaints on social media, and it sure saddens me to see what poor services we are getting and not only in our area but have also read when patients go to Bethel for care there is lack of services also. It is so sad to see our people going to Bethel for care of serious issues and having to go back home with no help. Then get the run around for appointments and travel. How can you better serve our people? Maybe you need to look at who is running the show? Times are changing and maybe it's time to change leadership if you all are getting so much attention with complaints.

Where is the respect, sharing and caring for our people? What is your goal for our people in the YK region?

I came across this on your website

At the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation we administer a comprehensive healthcare system throughout 58 rural communities with a mission of Working Together to Achieve Excellent Health.

This would be great achieve excellent health but it all seem in a stand still mode. Due to our clinics not being filled with health aids.

Our corporate vision and mission is guided by our values of Optimism, Compassion, Pursuit of Excellence, Personal Growth, Importance of Family, Trust, and Elder Knowledge.

Optimism-YKHC brings hopeless since most of our communities don't have the health care system in place.

Compassion- Should be within all of you to really care for our people.

Pursuit of Excellence-Need to really look at this again. Especially for our communities without health aids.

Personal Growth should show colors especially since YKHC has earned the Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval.

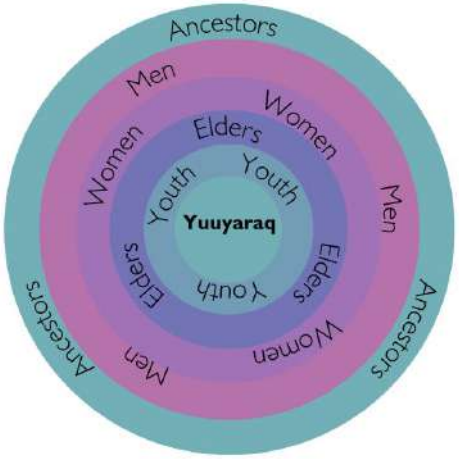
Importance of Family is this only for YKHC and their families?

Trust -How can we trust when we don't receive the services that is expected?

Elder Knowledge-You use this for respect or are you really relying on all our Elder Knowledge?

ACTIVITY: RESPONSIBILITIES WE SHARE AS COMMUNITIES

Facilitator: Cody Pequeño



Cody placed a piece of paper in the middle of the room that said "Yuuyaraq." He then asked the youth to circle around it, then behind them Elders, then women, then men. Cody explained that this is how our community structures have always worked. Everyone had a voice, and if someone did not agree, we came together to come to a solution.

- In the middle - **Yuuyaraq** - our way of life.
- Next, it takes the entire community to raise the **children**.
- As we grow up – **Elders** help us live the traditional way,
- **Women** surround the Elders, ensuring they are cared for.
- Then the **men** are on the outer ring, protecting and providing
- And the **Ancestors** guide us all.

"Everyone takes care of everyone – that's how we fix our future. If we lead with love."

When asked, youth felt strong, loved, and determined. Elders felt warm, protected, and proud. Women felt emotional, responsible, and that they were change agents to heal trauma. Men felt loved, a sense of responsibility, and connected to other men. Then, the group was asked to consider what had happened since colonization came into the region:

- First, the churches and government took the children away – the heart of the communities.
- Then, the Elders passed on, and fewer people were left to teach Yuuyaraq. Now, just a few Elders in training left, and they even know less about Yuuyaraq since the former Elders had to keep quiet for decades.

When asked again, the group felt lonesome, lost, sad, incomplete, hurt, angry, and worried.

- This was the start of our trauma from people who looked at us as savages, not humans.
- When the churches and government took the youth to the schools, people who did not love our children taught and disciplined them as they saw fit. Now, our people are disciplining our youth with anger and abuse, which is not the Yup'ik way.
- Then the children did not know – they were traumatized, now Elders have shared their stories so we can heal.

Intergenerational love starts with us.

- Teach your children, nieces and nephews. Every kid in our community is our responsibility.
- We have land and water that can heal. Whatever healed you, please share your stories with family, friends, and coworkers.
- Honor the guidance from our Ancestors and go on this journey together.

ACTIVITIES: EVENING

Jewelry Making, Bingo, and Moose Akutaq

In the evenings, TKC staff and regional representatives volunteered their skills and time so that participants could spend time learning in each other's company. Thank you to our activity volunteers and teachers!

Identifying Solutions for Our Region

Participants were asked "in one word, share how you feel about yesterday's activities and discussion." Word size indicates the frequency of mention. Image generated on Wordart.com.

PRESENTATION: TCC AND THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE

Presenter: Amber Vaska, Executive Director of Tribal Government & Client Services

The Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) represents 42 Tribal members and 37 recognized Tribes, proudly serving 18,000 members. Since 1915, TCC has remained dedicated to advancing Tribal sovereignty through advocacy and resources that ultimately lead to self-sustainability.

Tribes come together once a year to discuss how to advance Tribal sovereignty, strengthen wellness, and improve food security. Annually, Tribes enter MOAs with TCC that outline the relation, which can include different service options and self-governance roles.

One recent success story was Hughes Village, which enrolled in the Community Planning Program. The Village was close to losing its school, and through planning, identified there was a big need for housing. The village utilized placement and training funds to expand the workforce through housing construction and used funds to build a whole new subdivision. TCC's role sees its role as a technical assistance organization and convener, with efforts including:

- The Emerging Leaders Council, preparing youth to take steps as the next generation of leaders.
- Advancing Tribal management of natural resources, where stipends are paid out to Tribal members to pay for gas while hunting and have a phone; if they see someone trespassing, they can take a picture on the phone with date stamp and photo evidence.
- Groundbreaking land co-management, which includes a self-governance agreement between all DOI, BLM, USFWS, USGS, and NPS, saying even though they have separate jurisdictions, animals do not see that. The agreement acknowledges that everything is interconnected and that all organizations need to work together for sustainability.
- Hosting trainings to educate our people on how they can advocate for their communities. This helps us collectively have a stronger voice together.

"Our Tribes have answers, TCC helps Tribes get to the solutions for those answers."

Questions:

- What is the age limit for the Emerging Leader program?
    - Used to be 16 to 21, but they realized youth are still growing and updated their bylaws to 24.
- As Tribes, we have Tribal priority allocation programs that we can compact with AVCP or contract with BIA. For the question that was just asked, what funding sources are used to create that program?
    - Originated using an ANA grant, TCC saw its importance and now supports it with our administrative funds. Tribes' job placement and training funds can be used for leadership development. Tribes have the ability within TCC's compact to move funds around, but I am not sure within AVCPs.
- What is your contact information?
    - Phone 907-452-8251 x3110,
    - Email amber.vaska@tananachiefs.org
- Can you tell us more about home building within communities, like the success story for Hughes Village?
    - I can connect you with Hughes Village to hear their process. They needed action, so they developed their community plan, which is something TCC supports through administrative funds. We hire six community planners throughout the region to host community meetings, talk about priorities, and provide templates to develop community plans that can be used to apply for grants.

"What we are working together on is to say 'look at that opportunity, look at that success story. There is a roadmap there. How do we walk down that path? How do we bring that light back to our communities and make it happen in a way that makes sense for us and each of our Tribes."

DISCUSSION: EXPLORING A MIDDLE KUSKOKWIM COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

Facilitator: Andrea Gusty, TKC President & CEO

The group reflected on the power of collective voice and how it can be difficult to bring awareness to issues specific to the Middle Kuskokwim outside the region. Having a cooperative agreement could mean that we agree to disagree on some things. But we would align on the things that are important to the priorities of our Tribes, city residents, and shareholders.

"We're 10 small communities, but we still have needs. How do we make our voices louder, together?"

Thoughts Shared About What a Cooperative Agreement Could Look Like

What is a Cooperative Agreement?	• A formal arrangement between Tribes, organizations, or government entities to collaborate on shared goals, pool resources, and address mutual needs while respecting Tribal sovereignty and self-determination.
	  ○ "We have all the same organizations serving the same people.
	• The agreement is not the work; it is an understanding of what the work is.
	• Cooperative agreements can focus on broad or specific initiatives.
	  ○ "We aren't always going to agree, but we can agree on these things."

Examples of Success	• Utqiaġvik Trilateral Agreement between the City of Utqiaġvik, the Native Village of Barrow (NVB), and the Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation (UIC). This agreement aims to foster cooperation, communication, and collaboration among the three parties for the benefit of the residents of Utqiaġvik. • Anchorage – all the organizations that serve the Native people in anchorage to move forward together on

Benefits to Cooperatives	• Find solutions that are the right fit for the Middle Kuskokwim.
	  ○ We serve the same people and will have a louder voice and stronger impact on the things we do in the region.
	• Could pull our federal on other resources together to make a bigger impact (e.g., NAHASDA, BIA, IHS).
	• Can promote initiatives that matter to the region
	  ○ Preserving our culture, housing, school infrastructure improvement, **and** household energy.

What We Need to Do	• Convene together as 10 collective Tribes as one voice. ○ As a block, we make up nearly a quarter of all AVCP Tribes. • Unity in supporting the sovereignty of all our Tribes.

	○ Ensure upriver communities know about these efforts and that they are included.
Resources We Need	• Source of funding ○ Have grant writers in the region. Maybe could host a grant-writing class. • Tribal Needs Assessment • Tribal management services (e.g., UAF UAA)
Who We Need	• Potentially having those who only serve the Middle Kuskokwim as cooperative agreement signers (i.e., TKC, cities, Tribes, Kuspuk School District). • Need to have a role for everyone who serves in our region. This includes Native and non-Native organizations and agencies (e.g., YKHC, AVCP, businesses, youth, Calista, and nonprofits in each village).
Discussions to Have	• Interest in a subregional housing authority

"It's a way to show that Middle Kuskokwim is together - We know that we're together, but we have to show that to everyone else."

Group was asked "Do we want to work on this? By show of hands, is this something you believe our region would want to work on?" Nearly all representatives raised their hands.

PRESENTATION: ALLIANCE OF TRIBAL CLEAN ENERGY

Presenter: David Karabelnikoff, Alaska Program Manager

The Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy (ATCE) is a Native-led organization dedicated to supporting Tribes in transitioning to clean energy systems. ATCE provides no-cost planning, financing, and services that support renewable energy projects, as well as informs equitable energy policies and provides robust clean energy training programs. The entity is fully funded by philanthropic sources, avoiding federal dollars to remain independent of federal agency constraints. ATCE offers technical assistance and grant-writing support for renewable energy projects like microgrids, independent power producers, and Tribal utility formation. Two grant opportunities include the following:

- Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership
  - Learn more here or https://www.energy.gov/oe/community-microgrid-assistance-partnership.
- EPA Thriving Communities
  - Applications open for Round 2 through Feb 28, 2025. Multiple funding rounds. Learn more here or https://philanthropynw.org/epa-environmental-justice-thriving-communities-grantmaking-program

Questions for Presentation

1. MKEC was awarded a grant to update its system under the Grid Resilience funds. TKC has their $600K, but MKEC does not have the required 30% match. When will the $100M matching fund program launch?
   - ATCE hired a fund manager three weeks ago, so we are looking to launch it in about six months. We have also been talking with the Denali Commission about how to solve this gap in funding throughout the state and unlock grid resiliency dollars. If we learn about the need for matching contributions early on, we can more easily get the project in the queue. MLNP, which runs the Alaska Energy Portal, encourages people to put their regional plans on the portal. Tribal Energy is thinking of using that portal for applications to fund as well.
2. Can you explain your funding structure?
   - Our funding comes from private dollars, not government money, so we do not have to worry as much about government funds drying up. Our CEO had a huge vision for raising $100M to help address energy inequities, which is the vision behind our programming. The CEO sees Tribes leading in the transition to renewable energy and economic opportunity.
3. Have indoor smokeless wood stoves come out yet?
   - Not that we know of.
4. Do you have any assistance for solar energy individual homes that struggle or cannot connect to a power grid? I live away from the village and have power issues because of flooding.
   - The organization is exploring options, and David can follow up with some potential opportunities.
5. Is there any type of help we can get for Crooked Creek? After the breakup and with flooding, there is a need for small generators.
   - This is an idea the regional taskforce can explore.

PRESENTATION: DEERSTONE CONSULTING AND CLIMATE ACTION PLANS

Presenter: Nia Kramer, Project Manager

DeerStone Consulting has been working with TKC on a project called "Climate Action Plans." The plans are funded under the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Program, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and climate pollution. Supposed to make a priority plan that will become a strategic plan.

There is a current draft of the plan, and the group is seeking feedback on three main areas: Residential, commercial, and community building. The goal of the draft was to create an action plan to tackle some of the things we know are hoping at the home level and community level, with the hope of unlocking future funding. The plan offers solutions how to reduce greenhouse gases and make infrastructure more energy efficient, including weatherization. The project is sending the draft to each organization for their review. At the beginning of the outreach process.

Additionally, some upcoming funding opportunities include:

- Grid Resilience Program
    - Learn more here or https://www.energy.gov/gdo/grid-resilience-statetribal-formula-grants-program
    - If you have a diesel engineering system, cannot take and build new solar or wind farm. Funds cannot be used to replace the old system with a new system.
- Tribal Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates System,
    - Due May 31, 2025. Learn more here or https://www.energy.gov/scep/tribal-home-electrification-and-appliance-rebates-program. Permits up to $14k per home.

Questions for Presentation

1. Are cities eligible for Tribal Energy grants?
    - Only Tribes are eligible, but cities can participate in Tribal consortium. The Tribe could demonstrate a partnership with the city in its application through an MOA.
2. How much was the need for TKCs match for the grid resilience project?
    - $600K. TKC has its match, but MKEC does not have the 30% match the utility needs. The match is a heavy burden. Native Corporations were eligible to apply for the grid resilience program. MKEC tried to do the grant for all 10 communities, but the match was even more unattainable. TKC did not take the community's allocations; communities can still apply, and the funding is still there.
3. For the electrification grant – is that for all homes?
    - Individual homes can't apply: It is at the Tribal government level. Tribes can apply for up to $14K per home, but they do not always have that much allocated. It is recommended that you apply in a consortium. Unsure if every home is guaranteed funding.

Presentation Comments

- These grants could support non-HUD housing families. Many non-HUD homes need a lot of repairs, and these funds could fill in the gaps that HUD does not provide for these families.

DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE KUSKOKWIM TASKFORCES

This year's Gathering highlighted the idea of taskforces, or groups of people who work year-round to advance solutions in the region. These would be voluntary roles for people in the region and supporters of the region. Because taskforces are a new idea, the participants needed to discuss 1) which topics the taskforces should focus on; 2) who should be in the taskforces; how often they should meet; and 4) what was the purpose of the task force. The entire group started by brainstorming the following topic areas:

1. **Housing**
2. **Village infrastructure**
    a. Churches
    b. Water & sewer
    c. Energy
    d. Transportation
    e. Communication & connectivity
3. **Tribal/municipal capacity and governance**
    a. Building skills and knowledge
    b. Younger people starting to come in without knowledge of what to expect
4. **Food security, subsistence,** and environmental (land, air, water)
5. **Education**
6. **Cultural wellness**
7. **Public safety and social welfare**
    a. Drugs & alcohol
8. **Economic development**
9. **Healthcare**
10. High cost of living

After the group brainstormed the above, they chose eight (8) topics to focus on to continue narrowing down the highest priority areas. The bolded topics were further discussed in smaller groups. The process included two rounds, where, for one hour each, participants broke into small groups and discussed challenges, solutions, next steps, and potential partners. Small groups then shared highlights of their discussions with the entire group. The following pages are a summary of the discussions.

"We aren't staying stuck in the mud – we're walking out of it."

Youth Future Visioning

Youth discussed their thoughts on what they want to see in the future.

Challenges	Solutions
- Sewer - New school and equipment - Gym - Roads - Better cell service - Electricity - Stocked store - Affordable groceries - Law enforcement - Fire station - Health aides - Broken down vehicles - Jobs for youth - Drugs, alcohol	- Direct flights from Anchorage - Build new schools - Carpentry class - Youth fixing roads for jobs - Firefighting training/ first aid training (train recent graduates) - Math tutor so that youth can pass the TABE test (become health aides) - Shop class – small engines/trade class - Petition to limit alcohol in Aniak
In the Next 100 Years…	**Potential Partners**
- Fitness Youth Center (+1) - More jobs - Transportation - Stable airport - Hardware/shop (+1) - Hotdog stand (+1) - Restaurants (+1) - Bank - Housing/apartments - Fire station/Police department in each Village - More culture - Daycare - Elder home - Better healthcare/ hospital - Bigger stores - More gas - Native arts & crafts store - Museum	- Walmart - Target - Costco - AC - Kuik - YKHC - Alaska Airlines - Ryan Air - Grant Writers - Tribes

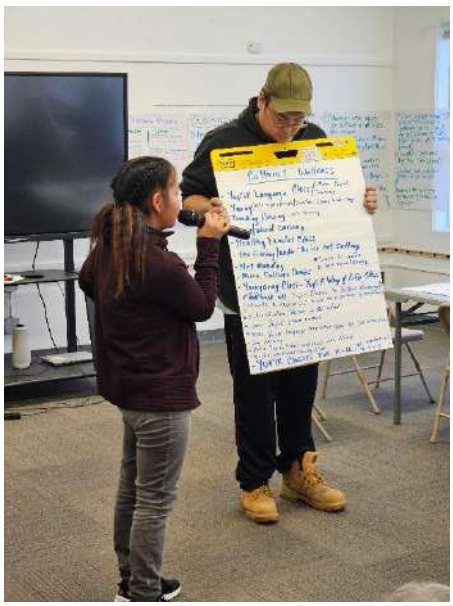
Youth's Vision for Cultural Wellness

IMMEDIATE ACTION ITEM: Send pictures of maps with Yup'ik names of places in the Middle Kuskokwim to schools.

- Yup'ik languages class - more Yup'ik teachers
- Yuraq – Make regalia, drums, dance fans, and learn local songs
- Beading and skin sewing
- Ivory and wood carving
- Healthy Families class
- Ice fishing and under the ice net setting
- Learn to make a sod house – Qasgiq
- Net mending
- More cultural camps
- Yuuyaraq class – Yup'ik way of life class
- Elder wisdom classes in the school
- Learn Yup'ik place names
- Make Yup'ik language translation apps for our area dialect
- Dog mushing
- Make Yup'ik values and words like KYUK
- Birch and grass basket weaving class
- Yup'ik classes for K-12 – all students and all schools
- Bring back all Yup'ik classes the district removed - Advocate to the Kuspuk School District Board about the importance of our culture

Reflections

- **Letting the youth direct the work:** The Yup'ik names for places are not being taught in the school, but there is a map with the names at the TKC office. TKC can share the map with the school.



Cultural Wellness

Challenges	Solutions
- Loss of Elders - Up-and-coming Elders come from a time of cultural change and don't remember or know how to pass on traditional knowledge - Need more cultural bearers to reteach us things we have lost - Lack of interest and participants from youth - Losing skills, stories, etc. - School district won't work with other entities on cultural activities	- Set up more cultural camps - Utilize current Elders we have left, record their teachings - Wellness gatherings in each community - Get kids involved and interested by bringing cultural activities back into the schools, bringing Elders into school
Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Approach school advisory board and school board with cultural wellness concerns and ideas - Culture weeks - Culture camps - Traveling culture advisor/teacher - Bring cultural wellness presentation gatherings to villages and cultural activity workshops - Keep activities consistent - Start culture taskforce group to start work, create partnerships	- AVCP healthy families - Local Tribes - School district - Cody Pequeño - TKC for land - Partnering with each other

Reflections

- **Letting the youth direct the work:** We need to work on the list of cultural priorities the youth gave us. We can start working on some of their requests immediately. We need to figure out how we can help each of us. A lot of their requests are the same as in 2020, and we need to start taking small steps now and make it real and consistent.
- **Concern about relying on cultural camps:** While a great way to uphold culture, cultural camps are only four or five days a year, and our way of life happens every single day. There are parts of our learning and our teachings that need to be happening in our homes, schools, and workplaces.
- **Positives of cultural camps:** Youth still want to make sure cultural camps happen because they spark interest in Yuuyaraq.

Education

Challenges	Solutions
- Lack of teacher housing - Kids leaving for better schools - Lack of home-grown teachers - Not in tune with cultural practices - Lack of social workers and behavioral health aides - Fewer in-person interactions and too much reliance on virtual/technology, creating a disconnect and weakening relationships - Lack of capacity - Learning disabilities not being met (no specialists) - Lack of resources	- Culturally relevant curriculum - Vocational-education programs - Identify and intervene at the earliest stage possible - Bring training to the village - Parent advisory in each community with student representatives - More opportunities for local training education - Optional online advanced courses - On-the-job training – home-grown educators - Provide teacher housing - Peer-to-peer mentors - Retirement incentives - Retention incentives for those with good evaluations - Community involvement in admin hire - School board that represents the people - Explore other district options like joining LKSD - Don't scare off potential staff - More local advocacy and involvement
Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Invite KSD to the table - Incentivize student involvement - Encourage Tribes to find students for workshops and gatherings - Explore a cultural season calendar and utilize teachers in service times during subsistence so kids can have cultural education	- UAS - UAF - UAA - APU - Calista - KSD – Kuspuk School District - AVCP TWD training - SOA

Reflections

- **Thirst for cultural education:** The Gathering participants agree that cultural education is a common theme throughout all conversations.
- **Expanding past youth:** Most conversations about culture are youth-centric and provide resources for them. Elder, adults, and young adults also need access to cultural education to ensure culture is lived in the home and every day.

Healthcare

Challenges	Solutions

- No health aides
- No walk-ins available in Aniak for Elders or those with disabilities
- Challenges with travel (e.g., flight time, no available flights, especially with Medicaid, missed appointments because of bad weather)
- Search and rescue in Bethel
- Suicide
- YKHC no longer does suicide prevention outreach in villages (e.g., talking circles)
- No fire department - no one will volunteer and cannot retain a fire chief
	- Council and community recruit a health aide
	- Reschedule appointment
	- Travel solutions
	  ○ Offer more chartered flights to Anchorage using other airlines (e.g., Lake & Penn, Ryan Air, Ute).
	  ○ Plan to fly earlier to avoid appointment reschedules
	- Write to our legislators for training and funding
	- Attract workforce and people for health roles
	- Use Aniak room for search and rescue training
	- Partners provide fire extinguishers
	- Suicide prevention

Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Pre-session, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 - Encourage Village Councils to hire the health aides - Encourage community members to fill out the YKHC health aide applications. Training is available to become a certified health aide practitioner. - Talk to clinicians to extend services in Aniak (e.g., walk-ins) ○ Aniak people who can't go in as a walk-in, either call YKHC or talk to Doris Turner, the new clinic manager here.	- Council and community to support health aids - Tell those interested in being a health aide

Reflections

- **Provide preparatory resources for the TABE health aide test:** Applicants are struggling with the math portion; maybe offer a math tutor to the people who want to be a health aide.
- **Community support for health aides**: A lot of health aides go through drama in villages and have a hard time. Need to support them and show them love.

Public Safety and Social Welfare

Challenges	Solutions
- The time to get Troopers to respond – challenges with P.L. 280 - Search and rescue needs - VPSOs/TPOs – lack of service providers - Need funding and training - Training is not local for the VPSO program - Historical trauma - City of Aniak needs a new landfill - Community of Aniak needs a new burial site	- Hazard mitigation planning for communities - Have a plan/standardized system to respond to crises (e.g., fire) - Provide opportunities to heal from historical trauma through traditional ways - ATC has a young, new fireman - Portable pumps and hoses
Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Get structural fire trainings - Get a dozer for a fire break (permission from TKC to use the dozer and break down trees for fire breaks) - Get a Small Community Emergency Response Plan (SCERP) and Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) - Operations plans – know that someone is here at all times -	- Tribes - TKC – work on new burial site - State of Alaska (Emergency Response Center, Commissioner of Public Safety, etc.) - Cities – for the communities that have cities - FEMA

Reflections

- **Model off other programs:** Bethel has a rural law enforcement safety program that is successfully designed for rural law enforcement.
- **Utilize available training:** Tlingit and Haida will fly VPSOs down to Sitka. The state has been cutting funds for a lot of projects, but the one thing the state hasn't cut funds for was the VPSO program. Now have 80+ VPSOs and a Native-led program.

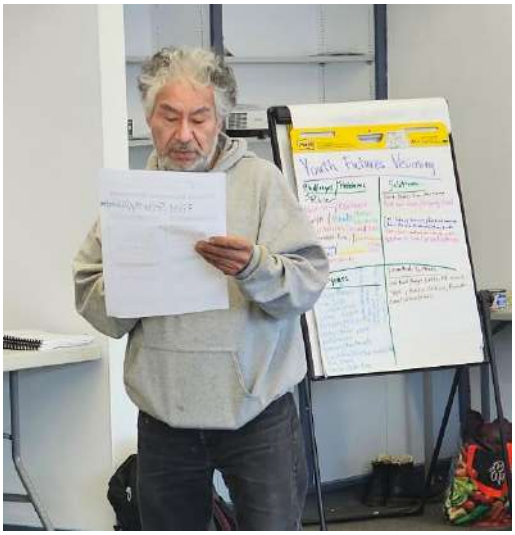
-

Food Security and Subsistence

Challenges	Solutions
- Impacts of high seas fisheries/trawlers - Technological advances causing ecological damage - Trophy hunters/fish guides (sport) - High cost of fuel - Climate change - General disregard of using Elder knowledge - Tier II permits (1 per household regardless of size)	- Continue advocating for fish and subsistence - Band together to establish a petition to the government - Establish partners for support to have a stronger voice - Identifying households without resources to hunt/fish/gather (Elders, widows, disabled, etc.) - Enforce engine size limits and restrict known spawning grounds - Petition the state to restrict fishing times
Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Look for grant writers - Think of alternative food sources - Reestablish a regional nonprofit or form a collective (KNH)	- Tribal unity – all Tribes - Other regions and outside agencies

Reflections

- **Expand subsistence to gardening:** Think about grants for gardens and farms to set up permits. Grow vegetables and pass them along to people in need to help with food costs.
- **Need advocacy**: Locally, regionally, statewide, and on a federal level.
- **Explore the feasibility of a documentary**: A potential solution is getting a documentary out to help the lower 48 people visualize how the challenges are impacting our culture. Most households do not meet AMS. We used to have full smokehouses and lots of fish in the river.



Tribal Capacity + Governance / Workforce Development

Challenges	Solutions

- Funding for permanent positions
- Keeping a workforce
- Developing the workforce to meet current job needs
- Need heavy equipment operators and mechanics
- Training
	- Job training
	- Including youth (16 – 25) in Council Meetings in meaningful ways
	  ○ Recommend that Councils potentially have a designated "youth" seat
	  ○ Follow-up with youth after they go away for school
	- Orientation for new municipalities Tribal Council Members
	  ○ New Council Member Mentorship Programs
	- Regional pool for benefits (e.g., retirement, health insurance) to be more competitive with out-of-region jobs

Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Create a new Council-member orientation checklist for Tribes to be able to use in the Middle Kuskokwim - Encourage current and past Tribal Council Members to talk about their positions on the Council with youth and young family members to inspire the next generation of leaders - Potentially start a youth professionals group	- TKC - Calista - Tribal Government

Reflections

- **Utilize partners for contact information:** KEF and Calista have a database of youth who are getting scholarships, could circle back with them for opportunities, and connect with support.
- **Build off other successful programs:** The new Council Members orientation program could be a nod to the Emerging Leaders program at TCC.

Village Infrastructure

Challenges	Solutions
- Cost of materials and transportation - Community capacity and local workforce - Regulations and restrictions to funding sources - Grant reporting - Timeframe/window of opportunity to build - Dilapidated and aging infrastructure that is currently not meeting the needs of the community - Land/allotments - Easements - Needing a certified workforce - Slow mail and USPS service - Individual homes without adequate power	- ANTHC/DEHE – AROC (water & sewer) - Policy and advocacy work (holding RCA & AEA accountable to rural Alaska) - Find renewable energy solutions (e.g., local utility providers) - Potentially create an Upper Kusko. Cooperative Utility - Samaritan's Purse for church build - Streamline grant reporting process - Explore Section 17's - AHIC Scattered Sites program - Solar panels
Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- Figure out how to develop an upriver coop and if it is feasible - Community agreements	- ANTHC/DEHE - MKEC - Calista - TKC - YKHC - Tribes across middle Kusko - Samaritan's Purse (church build) - Donlin Gold

Reflections

- **Explore more flexible energy funding:** Calista Government Relations advocates for energy programs at the federal level, but federal programs do not always fit regional needs; therefore, Calista has been advocating for a more open grants system. We need to make sure the federal government upholds its responsibility to us to electrify our communities.

Housing

Challenges	Solutions

- Land/property to build
- No real voice with AVCP housing
- 14c3 taking too much time
- AVCP giving small window between confirming 14c3 then getting plan in place
- Maps
- Utilities
- Pads/gravel
- Equipment
- Rules and regulations from HUD, AVCP RHA outside entities
	- Planned meetings for AVCP to go and meet with the Councils and let them know the time frame that they're doing this
	- Get land conveyed ASAP to put housing on (14c3)
	- Can furnish workforce with TKC shareholders
	  o Change perspectives about trade work
	- Write resolutions to whom we need to send the funding directly to us
	- Have TKC support training – local or on-the-job
	  o Carpentry – DL
	  o Plumbing and electric – CDL
	- Get gravel from Calista
	- Agreements/partnerships – work with other entities
	- DMV – get driver licenses for of age drivers

Next Steps	**Potential Partners**
- 14c3 land conveyance - Self-run housing in the Middle Kuskokwim	- TKC - Other TKC regional villages

Reflections

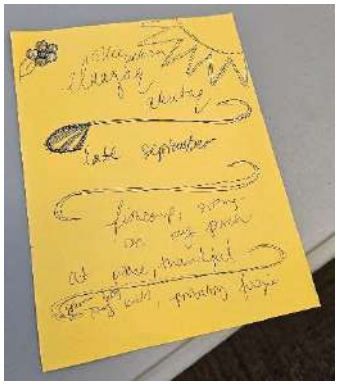
- **Make housing services more localized:** Explore the feasibility of disbanding the regional housing authority and doing something Middle Kuskokwim-led.
- **Leverage creative funding sources**: For building maintenance funding, utilize administrative costs or indirect costs. Pool money into a repair and replacement fund.

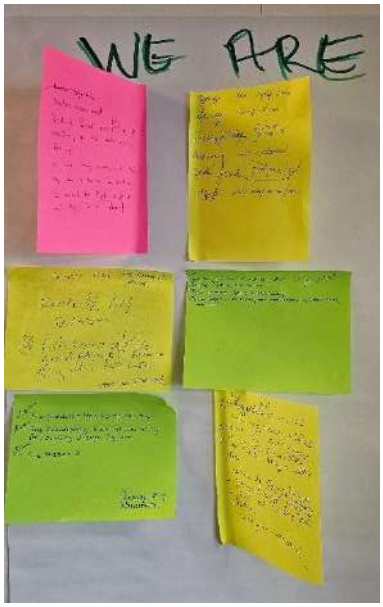
Reflections from Taskforce Discussions

These discussions displayed a shift in mindset, emphasizing empowerment, collective responsibility, and cultural resilience. The focus is moving from asking "What do we need?" to "What can we offer?" as individuals and communities take ownership of their wellness, education, and public safety. Preventative healthcare and cultural practices, like fishing, are highlighted as choices that sustain tradition and foster well-being. The group recognizes that true change begins at home, in hearts and families, rather than relying solely on external systems like hospitals or schools. Acknowledging the trauma of the past, the region can commit to healing together and ensuring a better future for the next generation. By working collaboratively and sharing responsibility, the region seeks to honor its Ancestors and build communities where children can grow up happy, safe, and proud of their culture.

Taskforce Next Steps & Closing

Opening Activity: Participants were asked to write down their favorite traditional food, favorite season, and favorite place in the region. They were asked to envision being in that place, with their food and that season, and to think of who was with them. Then, turn those into "I am" statements. "I am fresh dried salmon." "I am the fish camp." I am my grandmother."





DISCUSSION: TASKFORCE SPECIFICS

The group came together to discuss specifics on what could move the taskforces forward.

Who is Doing the Work

People in the MK	Youth	Elders	Taskforces
Our villages will be most passionate about causes.	Can help with outreach and social media.	Leverage knowledge.	Core of 4-5 people, then bring others in as needed. Do not need reps from every community or organization to get started.

What is the Purpose?

Advocacy (+2)	Communication and Awareness	Establish Out-of-Region and In-region Partnerships
Create and share a message to have a stronger voice on important topics. Bring in people who have the power to engage legislators and aids.	Stay informed on key issues. Advocate for upriver villages. Educate our communities on what we should be advocating for, where, and how (+1).	Identify ways Tribes can work together to overcome or develop solutions to the problems we have. Communities and Middle Kusko entities support each other.
Outreach	**Data Collection**	**Seeking Funding**
Incorporate kids & social media.	Collect, hold, and own our data.	Leverage Tribal sovereignty and specific funding opportunities.

Which Focus Areas Will We Start With?

Participants each voted on three topics they thought were the highest priority. The below indicates taskforces with the highest number of votes. Potential future taskforces could include public safety (14), village infrastructure (13), and Tribal and municipal capacity (7).

Food Security	Housing	Healthcare	Cultural Wellness and Education
19 votes	18 votes	18 votes	17 votes each – combined into one

Frequency of Meetings

Taskforces can figure out the frequency of processes and how they want to work together

Activity: What We Can Offer the Taskforces

Participants were asked to reflect on the way they could contribute to the task forces. On blue sticky notes, they indicated their skills that could support the taskforces; on pink sticky notes, the knowledge they could offer; and on orange sticky notes, experiences that could benefit the taskforces.

Skills that could support

Sharing the Message

- I can attend our meeting and discuss what went on and get it started *(Olga S. Evan, Lower Kalskag)*.
- I am a good networker, Yugtun speaker, and navigator *(Selena Malone, TKC)*.

Industry-specific Skills

- 42 years of health-related skills *(Clara Morgan, Aniak)*.
- Small engine repair *(Marcius Waskey, Crooked Creek)*.
- Lifetime teacher certification (retired) *(Shelly Leary, Napaimute)*.

Cultural Skills

- Cook and baker *(Christine, Crooked Creek)*.
- Fish cutting, office administration work *(Laura, Aniak)*.
- Advocacy training, culture bearer, gathering people *(Cody, Alaska)*.
- Helpful, cutting fish, giving when I can, making bread, and making akutaq *(Ellen Golley, Chuathbaluk)*.
- Beading *(MJ Nicholi, Kalskag)*.
- I like to go ice fishing and make qaspeq. Been in my sobriety for over 2 years *(Rose Evon, Aniak)*.
- I'm good at cutting fish *(Frank J Egnaty, Sleetmute)*.
- Fish cutting *(Lucy Simeon, Chuathbaluk)*.

Western Business Skills

- Can write and assist with important letters *(Nick Kameroff, Aniak)*.
- Data collection, advocacy, connections, and technical writing *(Iliodor Philemonof, Mtn Village, Calista)*.
- Energy, outreach, writing, communication, and research skills *(Naya Kramer, Girdwood & Anchorage, Deerstone Consulting)*.
- Writing and copy editing *(Brandon McIntire, Native Village of Napaimute)*.
- Good at writing and editing, office experience, cashier, and can call and reach out to people *(Kayln, Anchorage)*.
- Financial reports and meeting minutes *(Lenore Missy Kameroff, Aniak)*.
- Ideas and applying for grants *(Audrey Leary, Napaimute)*.
- I'm good at noticing things *(Tyler Sakar, Crooked Creek)*.

Positive Attributes

- Good vibes *(Jolene Avakumoff, Chuathbaluk)*.
- Asking questions *(Trisha, Aniak)*.
- Learn pretty quickly, gaming *(Samuel Holmberg, Lower Kalskag)*.
- I'm old *(Angela Kameroff, Sleetmute)*.
- Strong and independent *(Tracy Simeon, Chuathbaluk)*.
- I am a good listener *(Mary Morgan-Reynolds, Upper Kalskag)*.

Knowledge you can offer

Industry-specific Knowledge

- Knowledge of higher education system *(Brandon McIntire, Native Village of Napaimute).*
- Clinics, YKHC, travel, ASR Clinic *(Clara Morgan, Aniak).*
- Many years of nursing *(Mary Morgan-Reynolds, Upper Kalskag).*
- Knowledge of fisheries *(Nick Kameroff, Aniak)*
- Tribal governments, education, and strategic planning *(Audrey Leary, Napaimute).*
- Tribal government *(Tracy Simeon, Chuathbaluk).*
- Environmental and geographical, research skills and Alaska history, youth perspective, political knowledge and understanding *(Naya Kramer, Girdwood & Anchorage, Deerstone Consulting).*

Caregiving Knowledge

- Knowledge of childcare *(MJ Nicholi, Kalskag).*
- Taking care of grandkids *(Lucy Simeon, Chuathbaluk).*
- I know how to take care of the Elders *(Rose Evon, Aniak)*
- I have taken care of my family and make sure they are living a good life *(Olga S. Evan, Lower Kalskag).*

Cultural Knowledge Holder

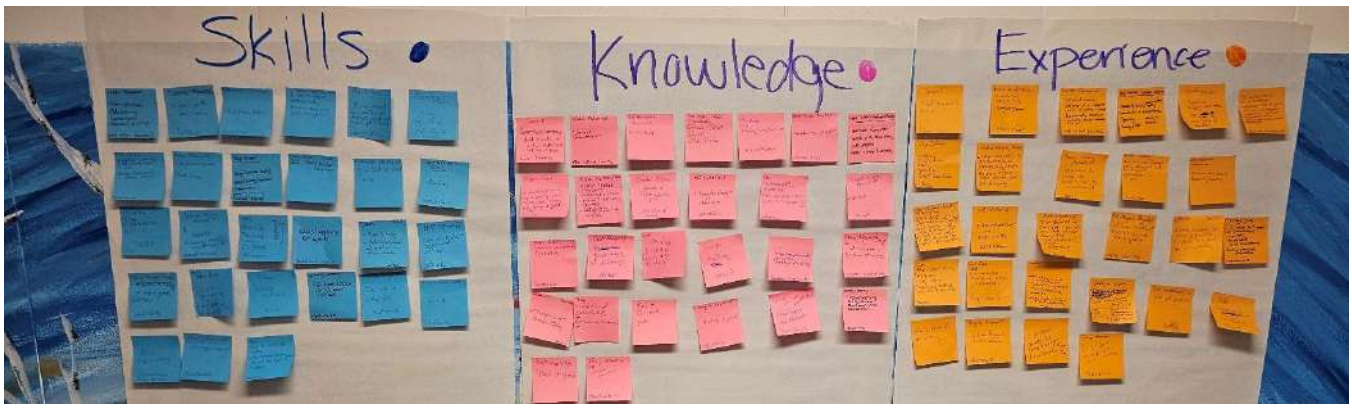
- Subsistence provider (*Marcius Waskey, Crooked Creek).*
- Incorporating culture and knowledge into education *(Shelly Leary, Napaimute).*
- Baking *(Trisha, Aniak).*
- Cutting fish *(Lenore Missy Kameroff, Aniak).*
- Yugtun speaker, programs, navigating for others, Native and non-Native crafts, researching and finding answers to resources *(Selena Malone, Palmer).*
- Making bread/akutaq, fish cutting *(Ellen Golley, Chuathbaluk).*
- Beading (*Jolene Avakumoff, Chuathbaluk).*
- Traditional knowledge, chain of command *(Cody, Alaska).*
- Fishing and Native foods *(Christine, Crooked Creek).*
- Making dry meat *(Angela Kameroff, Sleetmute).*

Western Business Knowledge

- Business and office knowledge, can navigate social media or research online *(Kayla, Anchorage).*
- Logistics, infrastructure *(Iliodor Philemonof, Mtn Village, Calista).*
- Find and write grants *(Frank J Egnaty, Sleepmute).*

Positive Attributes

- Build schematics of a few things outside of Alaska *(Samuel Holmberg, Lower Kalskag).*
- Good at games *(Tyler Sakar, Crooked Creek).*



What **experiences** do you have that you can contribute?

Technical Experiences

- Construction, carpentry (*Marcius Waskey, Crooked Creek).*
- Laborer, custodian, mom, grandma, great grandma *(Olga S. Evan, Lower Kalskag).*
- Was a CHA/P for 32 years, supervisor of CHA/Ps, people call me with health problems, I instruct and refer who to go to for help or consulting *(Clara Morgan, Aniak).*
- I have 30+ years in education (7 years KSD, 20 years LKSD, 3 years HeadStart), traveling certified substitute *(Shelly Leary, Napaimute).*
- I have experience in a lot of games *(Tyler Sakar, Crooked Creek).*
- I am a retired nurse for many years *(Mary Morgan-Reynolds, Upper Kalskag).*
- I was a cook for over 5 years. I have watched my mom for a long time *(Rose Evon, Aniak).*

Advocacy and Leadership Experiences

- Technical writing, working with a nonprofit (Calista Education & Culture), Government relations, Foundation board member (trustee) *(Iliodor Philemonof, Mtn Village, Calista).*
- Community service (volunteer, building, selling), communication with representatives, organizing, working with youth, working in kitchens *(Naya Kramer, Girdwood & Anchorage, Deerstone Consulting).*
- I am involved in the SCAC as well as state advisory committee, past experience in the KRITFC *(Nick Kameroff, Aniak).*
- Being a teacher aide for 22 years *(Lucy Simeon, Chuathbaluk).*
- Two-time school representative *(Samuel, Lower Kalskag).*
- Health aide, Tribal Councilman, public speaking, motivational speaker *(Cody, Alaska).*
- Experience from the military *(Trisha, Aniak).*

Tribal Administration and Program Management Experiences

- I worked for a Tribal consortium for 6 years and have a background in education, workforce development, Tribal governments, and cultural preservation *(Audrey, Napaimute).*
- I have experience in vocational and technical program management, the public assistance system, ICA, OCS, and contracting *(Selena Malone, Palmer).*
- I have worked for both the Tribe and the city, and airlines *(Lenore Missy Kameroff, Aniak).*
- Currently the City Manager and was a teacher's aide for 3 years, bookkeeper for 5 years *(Ellen Golley, Chuathbaluk).*
- I have experience in arts and crafts *(MJ Nicholi, Kalskag).*
- Accounting skills since 19 years old, experience working with 13+ Tribal programs and councils, knowledge of federal and state programs *(Laura, Aniak).*
- Different Tribal positions for 22 years *(Tracy Simeon, Chuathbaluk).*

Cultural Experiences

- Writing a short story, beading, and sewing *(Jolene Avakumoff, Chuathbaluk).*
- Cook and baker, talking to younger generations *(Christine, Crooked Creek).*
- I'm experienced at fishing *(Frank J Egnaty, Sleepmute).*
- I like to yuraq and tell stories *(Angela Kameroff, Sleetmute).*

Western Business Experience

- Managing social media, large email lists *(Brandon McIntire, Native Village of Napaimute).*
- Office and customer service experience, college degree, ordering and shipping items out to the village *(Kayln, Anchorage).*

Potential Taskforce Members

Representatives volunteered and recommended others who would add value to the taskforces.

Healthcare	***Housing***
• **Iliodor P**. (Mtn Village - Calista) • **Sue Hoddt** (Aniak) • **Christine S. John** (Crooked Creek) • **Clara Morgan** (Aniak) • **Mary Morgan-Reynolds** (Kalskag) • **Olga S. Evans** (Kalskag)	• **Audrey Leary** (Napaimute) • **Mark Leary** (Napaimute) • **Missy Kameroff** (Aniak) • **Naya Kramer** (Anchorage – Deerstone) • **Tracy Simeon** (Chuathbaluk) • **Ellen Golley** (Chuathbaluk) • **Iliodor P.** (Mtn Village - Calista) • **Laura Simeon** (Aniak) • **Denny Thomas** (Crooked Creek)
Food Security	***Cultural Wellness and Education***
• **Nick Kameroff** (Aniak) • **Denny Thomas** (Crooked Creek) • **Iliodor P.** (Mtn Village - Calista) • **Naya Kramer** (Anchorage – Deerstone) • **Christine S. John** (Crooked Creek) • **Tracy Simeon** (Chuathbaluk) • **Teresa Simeon-Hunter** (Chuathbaluk) • **Missy Kameroff** (Aniak) • **Marcius Waskey** (Crooked Creek) • **Dan Gillikin** (Napaimute) • **Briana Sherer** (Napaimute) • **Olga S. Evans** (Kalskag) • **Laura Simeon** (Aniak)	• **Shelly Leary** (Napaimute) • **Audrey Leary** (Napaimute) • **Marcius Waskey** (Crooked Creek) • **Tracy Simeon** (Chuathbaluk) • **Teresa Simeon-Hunter** (Chuathbaluk) • **Iliodor P.** (Mtn Village - Calista) • **Laura Simeon** (Aniak) Cell: • **Ellen Golley** (Chuathbaluk)

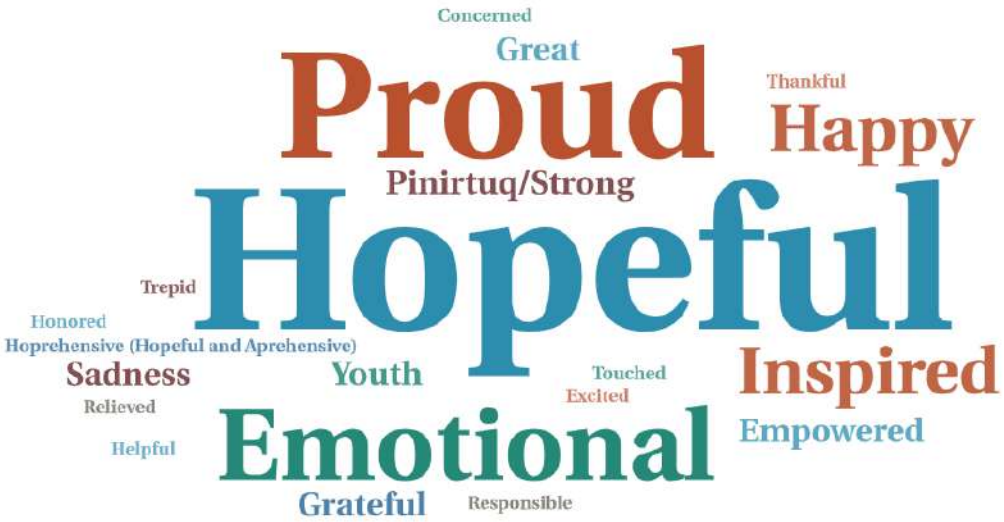
YOUTH FISHBOWL

At the end of the Gathering, the Youth came together to discuss their reflections and how they felt.

What is something you love about your community: • When we band together. • When everyone is kind and nice. • The outdoors and tundra places. • When we come together in hard times.	**What are some things you hope for:** • Places where Elders can teach us. • For many families and friends to learn about the past, culture, and way of life. • For a new school because ours is small. Then, kids would come back. • The community expands.
What worries or concerns you: • The school. Some students want to quit. • My family. • Alcohol. A lot of people drink. • Law enforcement. There is a lot happening, but law enforcement will take a day to get here. • How culture is dying out. Elders are passing, and with them, the language and Yuuyaraq. • We have almost nothing to fight fires. Fire extinguishers are barely enough to slow it down.	**What is at least one thing you promise:** • Promise to try at school. • Promise to help protect my aunties. • Promise to try and be the voice of the 11th grade. Classmates have a lot to say, but they go unheard. Try to be the voice of the class. • Commit to being more understanding and encouraging to everyone.

"Our youth have directed us. Now it is our job."

Participants were asked to share one word to describe how they felt after hearing from our youth. The word cloud below displays all the words; the larger a word's size in the image, the more frequently it was mentioned. Image generated on Wordart.com.



GATHERING CLOSING AND NEXT STEPS

Participants agreed on the following next steps:

Have First Taskforce Meetings

Establish taskforce members, then convene the taskforces to determine their composition, purpose, frequency, and process.

Bring Information Back to Villages

Participants will share information about the taskforces and potential regional cooperative agreement with community members, to see if there is regional support for these solutions.

Who is going to do the work? "You and me and me and you"

Faces of the Middle Kuskokwim

Appendix A: Acronyms

ACEP	Alaska Center for Energy and Power
ANA	Administration for Native Americans (ANA)
AVEP	Association of Village Council Presidents
AVCP RHA	Association of Village Council Presidents Regional Housing Authority
AFN	Alaska Federation of Natives
ANMC	Alaska Native Medical Center
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CHA	Community Health Aide
DOI	Department of Interior
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
IGAP	Indian General Assistance Program
IHS	Indian Health Services
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
MKEC	Middle Kuskokwim Electric Cooperative
NPS	National Park Service
NREL	National Renewable Energy Laboratory
NTIA	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
SAR	Search and Rescue
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TCC	Tanana Chiefs Conference
THO	Tribal Health Organizations
TKC	The Kuskokwim Corporation
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
UAF	University of Alaska Fairbanks
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
VPO	Village Police Officer
VPSO	Village Public Safety Officer
YK	Yukon Kuskokwim
YKHC	Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation

Appendix B: List of Presenters & Contact Information

In order of appearance

- **Cody Pequeño**
  - E:codypequeno@gmail.com
- **AVCP Healthy Families**
  - Program contact:
    - P: 907-543-8680
    - Toll-free: 1-800-478-3521
    - E: healthyfamilies@avcp.org
  - Staff
    - Elsie Smith (Yuktaq), Lead Facilitator;
    - Hilda Nicholai (Nanugaq), Family Services Specialist;
    - Kimberly Mute (Qassaqyuli), Prevention Unit Manager
- YKHC
  - Travel Program Contact
    - P: 833-543-6625
  - Staff
    - Lisa Wimmer, VP of Finance and CFO
    - Gin Howard, Director of Medicaid Enrollment and Travel
    - Frederick Wheeler, Deputy Director of Medicaid Enrollment and Travel
- **TCC**
  - Amber Vaska, Executive Director of Tribal Government & Client Services
    - P: 907-452-8251 x3110
    - E: amber.vaska@tananachiefs.org
- **Alliance of Tribal Clean Energy**
  - David Karabelnikoff, Alaska Program Manager
    - P: 907-206-1975
    - E: davidk@tribalcleanenergy.org
- **Deerstone Consulting**
  - Naya Kramer, Project Manager
    - P: (907) 599-0128
    - E:naya@deerstoneconsulting.com

Appendix C: List of Participants

Name	Community
Amy Brinkmeyer	Aniak
Tricia Folls	Aniak
Andrea Gusty	Aniak
Lenore Kameroff	Aniak
Marie I Kameroff	Aniak
Nicholas Kameroff Jr.	Aniak
Annie Morgan	Aniak
Bruce Morgan	Aniak
Clara Morgan	Aniak
Jordan Morgan	Aniak
Leona Morgan	Aniak
Lynette Morgan	Aniak
Tiffany Morgan	Aniak
Brad Pensgard	Aniak
Emily Peterson	Aniak
George S. Peterson	Aniak
Ollie Peterson	Aniak
Daisy Phillips	Aniak
Tamara Sakar	Aniak
Allen Simeon	Aniak
Laura Simeon	Aniak
Jonathan Samuelson	Georgetown
Lucy Simeon	Chuathbaluk
Tracy Simeon	Chuathbaluk
Ellen Golley	Chuathbaluk
Jolene Avakumoff	Chuathbaluk
Agnes Andreanoff	Crooked Creek
Christine S. John	Crooked Creek
Marcius Waskey	Crooked Creek
Denny Thomas	Crooked Creek
Tyler Sakar	Crooked Creek
Charissa P Evan	Lower Kalskag
Olga S. Evan	Lower Kalskag

Name	Community
Mary Jane Nicholi	Lower Kalskag
Mary Morgan-Reynolds	Kalskag
Lenora	Kalskag
Samuel	Kalskag
Megan Leary	Kalskag
Audrey Leary	Napaimute
Shelly Leary	Napaimute
Brandon McIntire	Napaimute
Mary "Bunny" Hoffman	Russian Mission
Brian K Derendy	Sleetmute
Brian Jr.	Sleetmute
Frank Egnaty	Sleetmute
Angela Kameroff	Sleetmute
Russell Pollock	Bethel
Yonna Pereyra	Bethel
Cheryl Thompson	Bethel
Joy Anderson	Bethel
Kimberly Mute	Bethel
Elsie M. Smith	Bethel
Hilda Nicholai	Bethel
Iliodor (Illi) Philemonof	Mtn Village
Selena Malone	Toksook Bay
Naya Kramer	Anchorage
Cody Pequeño	Anchorage
Kaylen Turner	Anchorage
Aimee Gilia	Aniak
Cassandra Robinett	Aniak
Lindsey Smith	Aniak
Jack Boelens	Aniak
Gabriel Ayers	Aniak
Blake Brown	Aniak

Appendix D: List of Questions from the YKHC Presentation

Questions About Construction Projects

1. Will the newly constructed facility belong to YK or the Traditional Council?"
    - Varies based on where the funding is from. If it comes from federal funding, it usually belongs to the Tribe. We recently submitted a grant for a clinic in Mertarvik. If it does get approved, the Tribe will own it.

Questions about Hospital Administration and Workforce

2. If the Tribe owns the facility, are they responsible for fuel, electrical, and maintenance?
    - Depends on what the original agreements were. It can go a few different ways.
3. Will YK pay for the workforce?
    - Yes, for most clinics, but it depends on the initial agreement. Even the ones the Tribes own. This is because YKHC usually works with Tribes through a 105(l) Lease, so it is like the Tribe is the landlord, and YKHC is leasing space to operate.
4. Are you staffing with existing staff out of Bethel, or do you have a rotating staff? How do you plan on staffing all these locations?
    - Currently sitting at 14 staff, but by the first quarter of 2025, hope to have 17 or 18. Departments fluctuate because they lose people to other departments. It is hard for staff to travel every week; they usually make it about three years. We are trying to have higher retention, but we seem to be seen as a feeding department.
    - We still have not recovered our staffing to pre-COVID levels. We are currently offering health aide bonuses and creating incentives for staff to stay and get their retention bonuses. There was a significant wage increase about 8 years ago, and the next one is for the health aides. Overall, YK is trying to pull away from temporary staffing and focus on hiring locally as much as we can to help address wage disparities with local hires.
    - There are places like South Central Foundation that offer scholarships to those they want to promote and go on to professional fields. YKHC does that as well, but we can never seem to give all the money away, and it is left sitting in a budget. For scholarships, YKHC prioritizes health aides who want to be PAs or CNAs. Prefer to hire Native. If you know people who want money, tell them to apply. All they have to do is to write a statement about themselves. Many people who go through the CAN class decide they want to be health aides.
5. When is YKHC hiring health aides?
    - As soon as someone decides they want to go to work, we hire them. Even if it is just answering phones.
6. Who manages clinics in the upper villages?
    - April from Aniak is now assigned to hire and manage all the clinics in the upper villages.
7. How many supervisor instructors (SIs) are there?
    - Nine – this is the first time in eight years that all the positions have been filled. Patty is working with Joe to have two more SI positions open up. In the past, they were not able to travel because of short staffing. Now, they visit their villages at least once a quarter, and most try to spend at least one night.

Questions About Expanding Services in the Middle Kuskokwim

8. Is there a way that YK could build a bigger clinic in rural places, like Crooked Creek, where the PA or dentist could have a place to work instead of one canceling the other?
    - Even in our largest clinics like Chevak, the providers, dental teams, and optometry need different spaces due to the types of equipment they use and the patient flow. It is very difficult for all of us to work in that space, no matter how big it is. Clinic size is not the only thing that factors in.
9. Why not bring the specialists to the villages instead of Bethel? It would save on travel costs rather than having everyone come to Bethel.
    - Can not speak for the office, but whoever is the decision-maker has decided to do that in Bethel.
10. What are the challenges of getting a health aid to Kalskag, especially since there is a building for them now?
    - The challenge is that it is difficult to find a health aide who will move from their home village to another village. Building a house in the community was a great solution. What YKHC is doing now is offering more money through a health aide relocation bonus to try to offer more incentives. This is one of the reasons YKHC often does not consider health aides from outside the region; there is often not enough money for them to want to relocate.
    - We have also talked about training the temporary paramedics and EMTs in Anchorage as health aides so that they can perform both services when they respond to needs.
    - Ultimately, YKHC would prefer to hire from the village itself to overcome these issues. YKHC will take anyone in the village who wants to be a health aide and will help train them at whatever level they are starting at. Hope is to decrease the barriers to entry.
11. Are there any plans to better equip subregional clinics with CAT scan machines?
    - There are two challenges: 1) Difficulty in training and staffing the machines, and 2) difficulty in finding enough room for the machines. Seeing if there is room for the machine is a great suggestion, but hiring staff to do CAT scans at subregional clinics would be difficult. YKHC is already having a hard time hiring them in Bethel. Unfortunately, training to run a CAT scan must be learned in a school and not onsite. YKHC can train people to run X-rays, which they have been doing in the region. All staff are also being trained to bring an ultrasound unit. YKHC now has two mobile X-ray machines that can help with tuberculosis. Trying to get them out to village clinics.
12. Can we expand air carriers to get people where they need to go? Have there been any improvements in this area?
    - It was hard after we lost RAVN during COVID. YKHC worked with Yute and got more service in the area. Fox must go through the FAA because they are only chartered right now.
13. Why can we not have sonograms and ultrasounds available in the travel clinics?
    - We just got grant approval for five ultrasounds in subregional clinics, so it is just a matter of when staff can get training and certifications, which should be in place soon.
14. When some patients go by charter because they are sick but do not meet the threshold for medivac, how should they communicate with the ER?
    - There has been a recent discussion about ensuring an ambulance is there. Looking at policy changes soon.

Questions about Travel

15. Why can Lake & Penn not be on the list of air carriers? Adding air carriers with more direct routing from home villages would be helpful.
    - To be a provider for Medicaid, the airline aircraft must have FAA approval and set schedules. Currently, Lake & Penn only provides charters and is not FAA-approved. Because the charters are so frequent, from the

community it may look like there is a set schedule, but there is not. YKHC can work with them to get FAA approval.

16. Does YKHC have any standards for airlines? Many people are concerned about the number of crashes some airlines have recently experienced.
    - For Medicaid, the airline must be FAA-accredited. Unless an airline loses its FAA accreditation, Medicaid does not restrict the airline. Patients have the right to refuse to fly with an airline (see follow-up questions).
17. Are there opportunities to accommodate people with flight delays and decrease the wait time between missed appointments?
    - Some staff are already working after hours to accommodate late flights. YKHC's pay structure includes a financial incentive for providers to stay late because their pay is based on the number of people they see.
18. Can we use direct flights from upriver communities, like Crooked Creek, to go to ANMC in Anchorage rather than travel through Bethel?
    - Due to the terrain, it is quicker to go through Bethel.
19. Can there be a dedicated care coordinator for travel? There used to be a care coordinator designated for subregions that would communicate about travel appointment times.
    - ANMC does send us appointment letters; until then, we don't know. The travel care group is the one who should be doing this, and patients should not be getting the runaround. This is a potential solution YKHC could explore.

Questions about Medicaid

20. With Medicaid, can you choose your provider?
    - The state policy is that you cannot choose your provider. You have to go to the nearest region provider, which, to the Middle Kuskokwim, is technically YKHC.

Proposed Solutions from Participants

- Can there be subregional patient housing in Aniak? More patients come here to alleviate issues with travel, especially from up-river communities who may not have family to stay with.

Questions to Follow Up with YKHC

1. In Aniak, the optometry specialist prescribed eye drops to everyone coming into the clinic, no matter the age, and diagnosed them with dry eye syndrome. The community is concerned about how this could negatively impact the health of individuals at certain ages.
2. In Aniak, someone came in and saw the same specialist. That specialist gave an opinion, and then the patient asked for a second opinion. However, the specialist refused to provide a referral, so the person could not get a second opinion. The community is concerned about accessing healthcare.
3. Does Medicaid allow the use of non-FAA planes for travel? Many people do not understand why non-FAA planes cannot be used for Medicaid travel, especially airlines line Lake & Penn or Fox, who might have more direct flights from some of the more rural villages.
4. YKHC presenters mentioned that a patient has a right to refuse to fly on a certain airline, but when a participant was in that position, the YKHC staff said they had to be medically cleared to not fly on that airline. Can YKHC clarify the patient's rights and the process of refusing to fly on certain airlines?