

**Agency: Commerce, Community and Economic Development****Grants to Named Recipients (AS 37.05.316)****Grant Recipient: First Alaskans Institute****Federal Tax ID: 92-0174854****Project Title:****Project Type: Other**

# First Alaskans Institute - Statewide Natural Helpers and Alaska Native College to Community Project

**State Funding Requested: \$600,000****House District: Statewide (1-40)**

Future Funding May Be Requested

**Brief Project Description:**

Building upon 10 years of success, the Alaska Native College to Community project will provide an essential work force development training and community strengthening opportunity for high caliber, motivated Alaska Natives across the state and the everyday, local unsung heroes we call Natural Helpers.

**Funding Plan:**

Total Project Cost:	\$700,000
Funding Already Secured:	(\$100,000)
FY2015 State Funding Request:	<u>(\$600,000)</u>
Project Deficit:	\$0

*Funding Details:*

*The Natural Helpers convening is a new endeavor and has no previous funding history. The summer intern portion of the project has received funding from the Department of Labor, the Denali Commission, The CIRI Foundation, Alyeska, and First Alaskans Institute, with over 100 various employers financially contributing. First Alaskans Institute has funded our Public Policy Fellows program in its current iteration and is seeking to expand the opportunity.*

**Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

In Alaska, our geography and the remote location of most of our villages make it essential to catalyze and utilize the energy, talent, and knowledge already within our communities. It is also critical that those who contribute to our community health, wellness and cultural integrity with little to no recognition are identified, lifted up, rejuvenated, inspired, and tapped as the knowledge bearers they are. We call these people Natural Helpers, those who elevate and contribute to healthy and thriving communities for the betterment of our state and are often not employed or job positioned to do this work. First Alaskans Institute (FAI) will convene a transformational statewide gathering where the goal is to develop and nurture community-informed and based initiatives for utilizing the incredible skill and work of these Natural Helpers.

This unique and impactful statewide gathering will create best practices which can be shared with others, and develop recommendations for growing healthier, more connected and supported communities. The impact of this convening will help community, regional, and cultural leaders and the state legislature make informed, effective and efficient decisions about the deployment of resources and support. First Alaskans Institute will utilize our extended statewide network and our indigenous values-based convening framework to catalyze and engage a deep dialogue on what our Natural Helpers need to keep doing their work, identify what they see as community needs, and develop best practices along with their grassroots

recommendations for creating healthy, culturally connected, and empowered communities.

In order to host this gathering, First Alaskans needs the infrastructure support of our interns and fellows, to fully realize success. We will create and host this gathering of Natural Helpers by utilizing our successful summer internship program and by amplifying the impact and reach of our public policy fellows. The project includes: 1) convening a statewide gathering of Natural Helpers, 2) funding the Summer Internship program that will have a focused community project built into the curriculum to identify and convene the Natural Helpers, and 3) funding the expansion of the public policy fellows into villages across Alaska that will include helping to identify, nurture, support and grow the Natural Helpers in their communities and connect them to the larger network.

The two key constituencies that will be catalyzed for this gathering have far reaching impact in Alaska: 1) Natural Helpers doing the work of supporting our kids and other vulnerable members of our communities, and 2) young Native leaders working hard to prepare for their professions and roles in our Alaskan communities. The Natural Helpers have critical knowledge about what our communities need, what helps them do what they do, what they need in terms of support, self-care, and learning, and can share and inspire young leaders to continue this impactful direction and leadership for empowering Native communities, cultures, and peoples into Alaska's future. Interns and Fellows will utilize their knowledge, connection, and passion for advancing Native peoples to support and empower Natural Helpers in our villages and other communities by using this as an opportunity to learn tangible project management design, implementation, hosting, and follow up skills as well as help develop and nourish their spirit of service to collective community health and wellbeing.

The Summer Interns and Public Policy Fellows participation in this community project will be essential for having on the ground presence in communities, identifying Natural Helpers, and building statewide collaboration through consensus and community building. They will learn project innovation, design and management, collaborative leadership, and will help First Alaskans Institute host a critical community empowerment dialogue for Natural Helpers - vital skills they need for the work force, as change agents, and to nurture their own tendencies as Natural Helpers.

The project directly works to countermand 'brain-drain' by giving Natural Helpers and young leaders more tools to help them sustain themselves, their work, and their communities. It has the potential to redefine how communities are catalyzed to actively develop and sustain strength-based solutions and the spirit of service that could also be used as a template or process for statewide impact beyond the specific participants and communities of this project.

The scope of the project, the participants and goals for their development are as follows:

1) Natural Helpers: The convening aims to bring up to 300 Natural Helpers together from across Alaska, with at least 12 Natural Helpers from each of the 12 Alaska Native geographic regional areas, to celebrate what they do and why they do it, share their knowledge and experience of their communities, develop a best practices toolkit, grow a community of practice and advance recommendations based on their knowledge to grow healthy, thriving communities. The Summer Interns and Public Policy Fellows will help identify participants, design, implement and host the project, so that the Natural Helpers are catalyzed, connected, and taken care of as they engage in deep dialogue and knowledge sharing sessions. The outcomes will be harvested to ensure tangible work products can be shared outside of the participants to spread the fire, the reach, and longevity of this work across the state. FAI will utilize our experience in large, interactive gatherings to shape and host the gathering, while using it as a learning structure for the young leaders.

2) Summer Internship: FAI will recruit up to 30 exceptional rural and urban Alaska Natives for job training opportunities co-mingled with educational, leadership, cultural, community and professional development. Employment opportunities match interns with employers in their field of study, such as planning, research, economic development, public policy, oil

and gas, health and wellness, government, education, nonprofits, Native corporations, banking, education, etc. Those eligible include Alaska Native leaders in vocational, upper-class undergraduate, or graduate school programs who are interested in temporary summer employment that nurtures their cultural context and commitment for strengthening their communities. It provides a direct connection to a network of over 240 alumni and introduces participants to various educational and career opportunities through their shared network and to some of Alaska's most engaging leaders. The success imprint of this target area is extremely high. Students who participate follow through in completing their educational goals and find relevant and gainful employment, most often within Alaska, for Alaska owned companies around the country, and for Alaska-focused governmental positions in key political offices in Alaska and Washington DC.

3) Public Policy Fellows: The expansion of this program aims to recruit and place up to 6 fellows who are high caliber young Alaska Native leaders interested in governance and policy for placement in villages or hubs in rural Alaska to build their capacity in governance-structured positions. This fellowship extends the reach of FAI's current public policy fellows that are placed in Juneau legislative offices during the session into a statewide program. To be clear, the funds requested for the expansion are only for the fellowship positions that are not located in the Alaska Legislature. The Fellowship is a work-intensive opportunity that leverages their abilities with social capacity connection to local government, aids in providing placement in rural communities, and countermands brain-drain. Workforce skills gained include advocacy, advanced research skills, making informed recommendations from research, drafting testimony and white papers, making policy based presentations, administration, building coalitions and support-networks, developing professional rapport with governance bodies and gaining skills for understanding and navigating our complex layers of government within Alaska. The placement objective is to increase the number of Alaska Natives working in governments, growing policy-makers, creating informed and engaged citizens, and providing experience in high pressure work environments.

First Alaskans Institute is ideally organized and purposed to do this critical work for Alaska because it directly aligns with our vision, mission, and strategic plan, and we have the experience, integrity, and deep community networks necessary to ensure the project's success. If the state is interested in building a paradigm-changing, grassroots Natural Helpers gathering to further the ability of Alaskan communities to advance their own solutions and enact them to achieve healthy, thriving people, families, and communities, this project achieves that while also embedding these values in young leaders across the state, ensuring a long term, sustainable movement.

### Project Timeline:

The project is to be implemented in FY2014. Expenditures occur throughout the year starting first with planning and recruitment, interviewing, orientation and cohort building, workforce placements, ongoing learning sessions, and the Natural Helpers convening. The project wrap up, products, and evaluation will be completed in the first quarter of 2015.

### Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:

First Alaskans Institute

### Grant Recipient Contact Information:

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Total Project Snapshot Report

2014 Legislature

TPS Report 62384v5

Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority?  Yes  No