

First Alaskans Institute

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Allison Knox, Communications Consultant, (907) 250-1480, Allison@akprconsulting.com

Jeanette Anderson Moores, Communications Consultant, (907) 229-6925, Mooreswj@gci.net

FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE AWARDS \$500,000 *Eighteen Collaborative Community Projects Receive Financial Boost*

(ANCHORAGE, AK--Aug. 16, 2007) – First Alaskans Institute announced today that \$500,000 will be distributed across Alaska to fund 18 projects that demonstrate collaborative efforts among community organizations, including family and community partnerships, to plan and implement innovative, lasting programs that contribute to healthy and thriving communities. The awarded projects specifically address early childhood education activities that better prepare children for success in school, increasing high school graduation rates, connecting Elders and youth in cultural learning, or promoting youth leadership development opportunities.

The Community Engagement Awards is a pilot funding initiative of First Alaskans Institute. It is the result of the Alaska Native community's feedback and recommendations that came from participation in many of First Alaskan Institute's initiatives, including the Education Summits, Leadership Development's Elders & Youth Conference and Summer Internship Program and the Alaska Native Policy Center's research projects and discussion series.

"The Community Engagement Initiative is another way for First Alaskans Institute to serve as a catalyst for positive change within our Alaska communities by enhancing opportunities for Alaska Native youth through education, leadership and cultural learning activities," said Janie Leask, First Alaskans Institute president and CEO.

Two committees, consisting of representatives from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Education Consortium, Rural Urban Exchange, Denali Commission, RurAL CAP, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council, reviewed the proposals and provided funding recommendations to the First Alaskans Institute Board of Trustees for final approval.

"We received an enthusiastic response—48 proposals requesting more than \$1.5 million—confirming the need for projects and programs that deal with education, cultural learning and youth leadership development at the local level," said Sarah Scanlan, First Alaskans Institute deputy director.

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First Alaskans Institute

First Alaskans Announces Community Engagement Awards

2-2-2-2

The \$500,000 awarded will support the following 18 projects:

- **\$30,000 to Kuskokwim Native Association** to organize a Kuskokwim Elders-Youth Summer Camp for members of the 29 Kuskokwim Watershed Villages to strengthen the Elder-youth relationships. One student per village will be awarded a two-week stay in the camp where Alaska Native Elders and scientists teach them traditional and scientific knowledge.
- **\$31,000 to Maniilaq Association** for “Project Life,” a youth suicide prevention program, to implement a program to increase the cultural identity of Alaska Native youth in the region which focuses on developing leadership and promotion of cultural continuity through the development of digital storytelling—which highlights cultural assets and encourages Elder-youth interactions through interviews shared with community.
- **\$24,000 to the Tribal Government of St. Paul Island** for a series of forums to increase knowledge and awareness of cultural traditions, provide practical information to parents and adults regarding parenting and education, and increase community collaborations that support youth success and leadership. An Alaska Native Elder and Youth task force will be formed to plan, run and organize the forums.
- **\$27,000 to the Native Village of Kalskag** to fund instructional lessons lead by local Alaska Native Elders on how to track, trap/snare, and utilize beaver and other animals in the area. Alaska Native youth will also learn about skin sewing techniques, the importance of sharing with Elders, and using all of the harvest—which will be documented for future reference.
- **\$13,000 to Pelican School District** to fund the Pelican Culture Camp, to unplug youth from the electronic age and plug them into the traditional values, by teaching traditional Native values, skills and ways of problem solving; the importance of the Native language; the ecology of the area and how to collect seaweed, medicine plants, and fish; make traditional regalia; and strengthen traditional values to help with Western education.
- **\$30,000 to Aniak Traditional Council** to connect Alaska Native Elders and youth in cultural learning and promoting youth leadership development opportunities by conducting monthly meetings to strengthen leadership skills; Elder/youth weekly classes focused on sharing traditional knowledge and learning Native dance; and the production of a video to share with the region at community potlucks and the Kuskokwim Native Association Annual Elders/Youth Conference.

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First Alaskans Institute

First Alaskans Announces Community Engagement Awards

3-3-3-3

- **\$30,000** to the **Native Village of Kwigillingok** to build, and instruct the safe use, of 10 traditional Yup'ik kayaks to promote youth and Elder connections and the transmission of cultural knowledge. The program will also train student kayakers, and provide hands-on assembly, and the ability to have camps, races, and traditional hunting contests.
- **\$30,000** to **Hydaburg Cooperative Association** to implement a Haida language and culture program and curriculum developed by Alaska Native Elders and experts to focus on learning the spoken and written Haida language, including the creation of a video broadcast on local television and an education CD to distribute to the local schools, Boys and Girls Club, and archived for future generations at the Hydaburg Cooperative Association.
- **\$30,000** to the **Native Village of Marshall** to create teaching components with the Takchak dancers to increase community participation in the revitalization of the Yup'ik dancing traditions—which will entail three practice sessions per week and understanding the symbolism of the dances as well as how to make dance regalia.
- **\$35,000** to the **Alaska Native Heritage Center** for Anchorage School District high school students to receive academic credit for cultural activities, leadership skills, and employment training by connecting these urban youth with Alaska Native Elders and traditionally-based activities through a series of eight Saturday programs beginning in October 2007 through April 2008; the training of 18 summer season cultural hosts by Elders and tradition bearers; and a cultural tourism practicum for summer interns to receive training with mentors and Alaska Native Elders.
- **\$23,000** to **Sleetmute Traditional Council** to develop a pilot project to counteract school dropout, substance abuse, and feelings of negativity and hopelessness by offering a series of workshops which will focus on leadership and life skills, adult workshops for high-risk students, and a joint session to develop a wellness plan to benefit the villages of Sleetmute, Red Devil, Georgetown, and Stony River,
- **\$35,000** to the **Native Village of Tanacross** to repair the local community building to hold weekly cultural activities and events focusing on traditional food preparation and preservation, hands-on crafts, and the Tanacross language as well as sobriety events and an aftercare program.
- **\$28,000** to **Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska** to enhance the Bridges for Native Middle-School Youth with an after-school program for Alaska Native students by providing adult relationships with Native role models and non-Native mentors as well as participation in two retreats: an after-school component and Celebration 2008—a Southeast Native event—for Alaska Native youth to strengthen their voices and presence in school and community.

First Alaskans Institute

First Alaskans Announces Community Engagement Awards

4-4-4

- **\$19,000 to Cape Fox Heritage Foundation** for the creation of the "weLEAD" project to provide Elder and youth connections for cultural learning and develop leadership skills among Alaska Native youth through a series of regular seminars that focus on topics such as business skills, personal finance, writing, public speaking, and basic leadership. The Photovoice project—a video documentation to provide an avenue for Elders to share their cultural knowledge and traditional ways with the youth and Native youth to share some of the “new ways” with the Elders—will also be developed.
- **\$23,000 to Denakkanaaga** to train youth in all aspects of stage production, set creation, and performance in plays by producing a play based on Sydney Huntington's "Shadows of the Koyukuk," to increase youth interest in Alaska Native history, culture, arts/theatre/drama and increase organizational collaboration within the community and parent involvement in an educational and fun project for youth.
- **\$30,000 to the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association** to develop a screening tool and standardized teaching modules in the Unangam Tunuu (the Aleut language) for pre-kindergarten use by utilizing Alaska Native Elders to connect with children, families, and staff in the Head Start programs and lead them in cultural learning activities.
- **\$22,000 to the Native Village of Kotzebue** to produce three CDs and three booklets to help the community learn to use everyday Inupiaq phrases and traditional and contemporary songs. The materials will be used with pre-school aged students in Kotzebue’s Nikaitchuat Illisagviat immersion school, and with pre-school aged youth and their families throughout the region by the staff of the NWABSD Early Learning First Program.
- **\$40,000 to RurAL CAP** to host an Early Childhood Summit highlighting best practices in early childhood education for parents of children ages zero to five, educators, and partners from 26 rural communities. The Summit will also offer workshops in brain development, learning styles, culturally responsive curriculum, and training individuals to bring information back to their communities.

First Alaskans Institute is a non-profit organization whose mission is to advance Alaska Natives Peoples and communities through community engagement, information and research, collaboration, and leadership development. For more information, visit www.firstalaskans.org.

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