

# First Alaskans Institute

Community Engagement Update  
*Week of July 8, 2020*

**As a statewide Native nonprofit, our FAI team is very connected to our home communities, regions, and our statewide Native family. During one of our weekly virtual team meetings, we share community engagement updates on various happenings in our communities to help guide our work. In an effort to share our knowledge harvest - recognizing this is not a comprehensive overview of all current Alaska Native news - here are some of the updates that were shared about what our communities are experiencing:**

## **Community Updates - 7/08/2020:**

### **\*Our communities stay vigilant and actively pursue ways to prepare for and respond to COVID-19\***

There's much confusion about what CARES Act funding is available for Tribes and what the funds can be used for. Federally recognized Tribes were eligible to receive CARES Act funding through two separate allocations:

- One allocation was made through the Dept. of Interior, Indian Affairs which was distributed to all Tribes with current P.L. 93-638 contracts through the BIA; the second was through the Dept. of Treasury. In order to access the funding from Treasury, Tribes had to create accounts and complete their application process within their specified application period; not all Tribes were able to meet the deadline requirement.
- Each allocation has different funding requirements and restrictions, and each Tribe is a sovereign government that self-determines the needs of their citizens. As such, there are no one-size-fits-all determinations for fund usage. We've heard that there are people in our communities wondering if tribal members would receive a direct distribution of funds.
  - Some Tribes are looking at creative ways of distributing funding to their citizens such as a fuel benefit or purchasing gift cards for local stores for tribal citizens to use.
  - Tribes are independently reviewing the needs of their communities and identifying the best means to help their people during this crisis, however all must comply with the strict restrictions imposed by the department that disbursed the funding.

The Native Village of Barrow Tribal Council approved an economic impact relief payment and a utilities relief payment to all eligible tribal members based on need and economic circumstances. Applications are open for tribal members:

<https://www.facebook.com/loyla.leavitt/posts/10157207076981232>

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The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) hosted an informational virtual meeting on July 8 to hear BIE leadership present its plans for distributing its CARES Act funding to schools to support the COVID-19 Pandemic recovery: <https://www.bia.gov/covid-19/cares-act>

The Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA) continues offering COVID-19 testing at the Wiley Post Airport in Utqiagvik. Despite the rush when people arrive, they are able to test people pretty quickly: <https://www.facebook.com/ArcticSlope/posts/3844864988921968>

- ASNA continues to offer drive-through testing: <https://www.facebook.com/ArcticSlope/photos/a.271087576299745/3878189722256161/?type=3&theater>
- To protect Elders, ASNA has designated appointment times from 10 am-noon for Elders: <https://www.facebook.com/ArcticSlope/photos/a.271087576299745/4022868051121660/?type=3&theater>

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation is offering free testing to incoming travelers at the airports in Bethel, Aniak and St. Mary's. These airports are the only ones in the region with direct flights from Anchorage, or anywhere outside the Y-K Delta:

<https://www.kyuk.org/post/ykhc-offering-covid-19-tests-incoming-travelers-aniak-st-marys-and-bethel-airports>

The Lower Yukon School District and a contracting company implemented additional coronavirus policies after a worker tested positive for COVID-19 in Mountain Village:

<https://www.kyuk.org/post/lysd-and-contracting-company-add-precautions-after-worker-mt-village-tests-positive-covid-19>

People in an interior village were scared after a community member tested positive for COVID-19. The community stopped travel for a period of time, and many people stayed home and cleaned up during this time to help minimize spread of the virus.

The Metlakatla Indian Community continues updating their community and working toward prevention efforts of COVID-19.

- They shared a risk identification guide report where Metlakatla was listed as a low risk area for COVID-19 this week: <https://www.facebook.com/141055983004923/photos/a.147779542332567/976457032798143/?type=3&theater&ifg=1>
- The Metlakatla Finance Committee approved recommendations to distribute CARES Act funds through utility, water and garbage stipends, food vouchers, and small business start-up funding: <https://www.facebook.com/141055983004923/photos/a.147779542332567/973001529810360/?type=3&theater>

Events like traditional memorial potlatches continue to be postponed in interior communities due to the coronavirus and corresponding tribal mandates. Travel to and from villages can be challenging at this time when travel mandates are updated frequently. It is important to check

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with local Tribes, cities and airlines before traveling to abide by their mandates and help minimize the spread of this detrimental virus to our villages.

The City of Fairbanks has opened up an application process for individuals and businesses for CARES Act relief funds to provide emergency financial assistance to those directly impacted by loss of income due to COVID-19: <https://www.fairbanksalaska.us/mayor/page/cares-act-relief-funds>

The 10th positive COVID-19 test was confirmed in Kodiak. A new COVID-19 testing site was added at the Kodiak Benny Benson State Airport:

[http://www.kodiakdailymirror.com/extra/article\\_07f02dbe-bce1-11ea-90e6-07081965c8c2.html](http://www.kodiakdailymirror.com/extra/article_07f02dbe-bce1-11ea-90e6-07081965c8c2.html)

**\*Many of our communities are preparing for the 2020/2021 school year\***

The Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA) is deliberating their operations plan for the boarding school in Galena. They may limit the number of students enrolled, which would create additional impacts to students who attend the school from around the state.

[https://www.facebook.com/kiyugalena/posts/1762304590576952?\\_tn=-R](https://www.facebook.com/kiyugalena/posts/1762304590576952?_tn=-R)

Mt. Edgecumbe High School has announced their plan to resume in-person education this fall with a number of precautions in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19:

<http://sitkasentinel.com/7/2012-05-10-22-08-10/local-news/16864-mehs-plans-to-reopen-with-kids-protected>

**\*Our Native ways of life as we know it continues – always has, always will – as our peoples harvest from the lands and waters\***

As the stewards of these lands for thousands of years, our communities continue to live our ways of life as we always have. However, it has grown increasingly difficult in the Y-K Delta region for families to put up enough fish for the winter as the past few years have seen continual decline in the salmon runs. Community members are expressing long-held frustration with the ways that fisheries management in the region continues to exclude indigenous ways of knowing about a resource that has been successfully stewarded by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. There is hope that the silver salmon runs will make up for low chum and red salmon runs.

- The Yukon chum commercial opener in District 1 was canceled due to low number of summer chums and a poor harvest during the last opening:  
<https://www.kyuk.org/post/yukon-chum-commercial-opener-canceled>
- The Kuskokwim Bay will have its third commercial salmon fishing opening of the season on July 8: <https://www.kyuk.org/post/third-commercial-opening-season-announced-kuskokwim-bay>

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Fishing, hunting and gathering continues across the state.

- Huslia people are busy fishing for sheefish and starting to pick salmonberries.
- Wainwright residents are looking forward to beluga whale hunting season.
- Despite normal counts for red salmon fishing, it is slow in Kodiak. However, people are still getting out to fish. Kings seem to be running and some of their late fish, like silvers and pinks, are coming in early.

**\*Racial equity topics continue to be raised around the state\***

The Alaska Institute for Justice, in partnership with First Alaskans Institute, hosted the Alaskans Unite - Panel discussion on racism in Alaska's communities on July 9. Panelists included Dr. E.J. Ramos David, George Martinez, Jr. and Kevin D. McGee. Our very own Ayyu Qassataq, Vice President and Indigenous Operations Director and Barbara 'Wáahlaal Gíidaak Blake, Alaska Native Policy Center Director, both hosted and participated in the discussion. A recording of the video will be made available soon on the AIJ Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/AKIMMIGRATION/photos/a.406735419387172/3238784629515556/?type=3&theater>

After watching protests unfold for Black lives in Alaska and across the country, Lacey Davis posted a video on Facebook about her experiences of growing up Black in Juneau:

<https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/07/05/a-former-student-speaks-out-about-racism-in-juneau-schools-administration-says-itll-do-better/>

**\*Our people and organizations all over the state are making virtual space for cultural sharing, storytelling, connectedness and learning\***

Noah Loves Kristy continues posting entertaining videos of life in rural Alaska. Their videos often get thousands of views and hundreds of shares. They recently posted a comical video about cousins in Toksook Bay: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=271069380881694>

Native Peoples Action began hosting a Ts'ítq'u Nech'ghidnu (We are working as one): Catalyzing Change Webinar Series. The first webinar on Policy & People Power was held on July 7 with Senator Elvi Gray Jackson and our very own Liz La quen náay Medicine Crow, President & CEO: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=325158451839148&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=325158451839148&ref=watch_permalink)

Patuk Glenn of Utqiagvik has been making cool content for our people on TikTok. She likes sharing our traditional ways of life, like eating maktak. She was recently interviewed on KTVA where her video on traditional ice cellars was featured:

<https://www.ktva.com/story/42325750/going-viral-alaskan-tiktokkers-make-their-mark>

- Find Patuk on TikTok at: <https://www.tiktok.com/@patukglenn>

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### **\*Other community happenings and news\***

Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) hosted a Q&A session on the importance of being counted in the 2020 Census on July 9. Diana Campbell of FNA interviewed Jolene Malamute, a community planning coordinator at the Tanana Chiefs Conference:

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=751432705624880&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=751432705624880&ref=watch_permalink)

The Metlakatla Indian Community started a construction project for a Veterans Cemetery Project, and they notified the community of the route of large equipment and dump trucks:

[https://www.facebook.com/Metlakatla-Indian-Community-141055983004923/?tn-str=k\\*F](https://www.facebook.com/Metlakatla-Indian-Community-141055983004923/?tn-str=k*F)

The State of Alaska has a Missing Money page for unclaimed property for individuals and businesses. These include, but are not limited to, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, bank accounts, un-cashed payroll checks, utility deposits, traveler's checks, and contents from safe deposit boxes. If you find your name or business on the list, you can fill out a claim to request the property: <https://missingmoney.alaska.gov>

Anchorage Daily News is hosting a discussion on July 10 about their collaboration with ProPublica investigating sexual assault in Alaska. The focus of the discussion is "Unheard," a recent monthlong project that published the stories and portraits of 29 Alaska survivors of sexual assault: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/lawless/2020/07/08/watch-alaska-journalists-sexual-assault-survivors-discuss-our-unheard-series-in-this-special-online-event-friday/>

Doyon Foundation continues featuring language champions, like George Holly, recently. George is an artist and songwriter who grew up in Ts'eldahthnu (Soldotna) on the Kahtnu (Kenai) River. His language is Deg Xinag, the language of Alaska Native people of the Lower Yukon and Innoko Rivers: <https://doyonfoundation.wordpress.com/2020/06/29/language-champion-george-holly/>