



## Drumbeats Alaska Consortium: Place-Based Solutions for Alaska Native Food & Energy Sovereignty (2022-2025)

# 2024-2025 Annual Evaluation Report

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

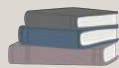
For over 20 years, the Drumbeats Alaska Consortium has advanced and supported place-based food and energy sovereignty on the traditional lands of Alaska Native people with the support of the USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture. This report summarizes the results of the third project year of a three-year USDA NIFA award (2022-38470-38354) that has been approved for an additional year, ending in 2026.

## STUDENT IMPACT SNAPSHOT

# 735

Students received financial support to take college courses

*In addition to tuition, students also benefited from:*



Curriculum development & resources



Travel funding



Mentorship & leadership opportunities

Course support  
provided to college  
students

# \$188,088

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Drumbeats Alaska Consortium

The Drumbeats Alaska Consortium integrates academic and community outreach initiatives across five Alaska Native-Serving Institution campuses within the UAF College of Indigenous Studies (CIS). Together, the campuses provide five unique educational programs rooted in place-based curricula that center Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies in Food and Energy Sovereignty (FES). Through diverse collaborations across the state, Drumbeats increases access to academic courses; experiential learning; and leadership development. A new approach to advance leadership in FES will be the design and implementation of an Indigenous Scholars Program (ISP) that will engage both Drumbeats students and faculty in Alaska Native leadership and community outreach principles.

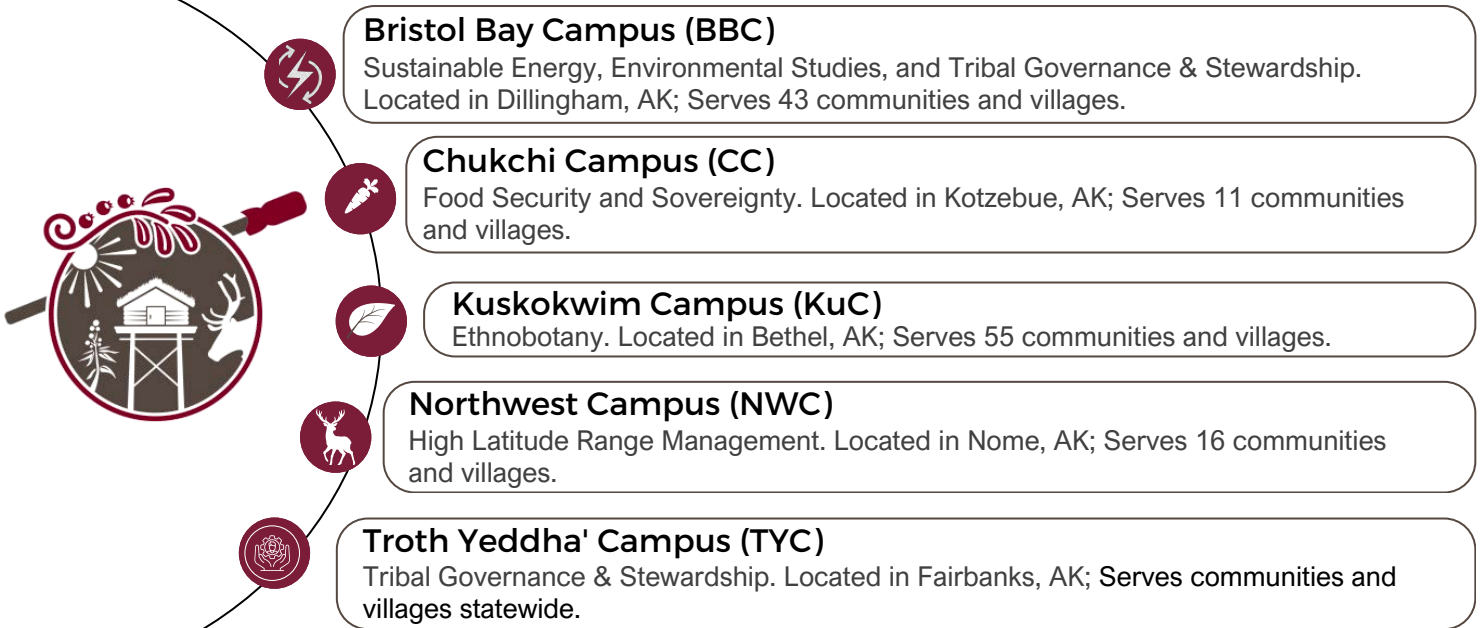


Fig. 1. UAF College of Indigenous Studies Map of Community and Rural Campuses



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shae, a UAF alumna, is advancing sustainable energy in rural Alaska. With support from the Drumbeats Alaska Consortium, she pursued further education through UAF's Bristol Bay Campus Sustainable Energy Program. Now part of the Energy Leadership Accelerator, she researches converting municipal solid waste to electricity in Cordova, AK, and helps communities secure renewable energy funding. Her hands-on work, including building her own home, shows how UAF and Drumbeats prepare students with practical skills to drive lasting change in remote Alaska.



Drumbeats activities are funded by the USDA NIFA ANNH program, which provides three-year grants. Drumbeats is an integral part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) College of Indigenous Studies, dedicated to advancing place-based, culturally relevant education for Alaska Native communities. The consortium focuses on critical areas, including food and energy sovereignty, traditional crafts and languages, and tribal governance. Leading this initiative is Carrie Stevens, a professor of Tribal Governance and Stewardship, who serves as the Principal Investigator. She works in collaboration with the Campus Directors from participating Alaska Native-serving institutions, who act as Co-Project Directors, ensuring a broad and representative leadership structure. In Year 3, the consortium continued to support students, launched new initiatives, and explored collaborations to grow and sustain food and energy sovereignty within its service regions.

## Highlights of Drumbeats Support in 2024-2025

### Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI)

Drumbeats funded tuition for students in the 43rd cohort of the Rural Alaska Honors Institute.

### Center for One Health Research

Drumbeats supported students gaining leadership experience by interviewing Alaska Native elders about interconnected health.

### Gwich'in Legacy Project

Drumbeats funded a documentation and educational project creating short legacy films to preserve traditional Gwich'in knowledge.

### Applied Arts (APAR) Classes

Drumbeats covered student tuition for three hands-on APAR courses teaching traditional skills, local autonomy, and food/resource systems, also providing supplies.

### Envisioning the Future

Drumbeats funded a special, two-part Tribal Governance course series with the Tanana Chiefs Conference Emerging Leaders, equipping 27 students with core concepts in tribal government, Federal Indian Law, and self-determination to enhance tribal governance in the region.

# DRUMBEATS

## a short history

### ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Drumbeats champions education initiatives in a myriad of ways:

#### Curriculum Development

Support is provided for faculty to develop new courses and improve existing courses that meet the evolving needs and realities of tribal communities across Alaska.

Courses cover (but are not limited to) Ethnobotany (KuC), High Latitude Range Management (NWC), Sustainable Energy (BBC), Tribal Governance and Stewardship (BBC, CIS), and Traditional Crafts and Native Language (CIS).

#### Course Delivery

Courses are delivered using multiple modalities, including distance education and place-based intensive courses to meet community and student needs.

#### Direct Support to Students

Scholarships allow students to enroll and take classes at lower cost and/or free of charge. In just Year 3, this grant alone provided \$188,088 in scholarships to 735 students.



For over 20 years, the Drumbeats Alaska Consortium has advanced and supported place-based food and energy sovereignty on the traditional lands of Alaska Native people. To that end, Drumbeats supports curriculum development and provides student scholarships, supporting the participants in becoming the next generation of Alaska Native leaders. The Consortium unites academic and community outreach programs from five Alaska Native-Serving Institution campuses within the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) College of Indigenous Studies (CIS).

The Drumbeats Consortium was founded in 2005 and launched their first academic programs in 2007. In 2009, they expanded their focus to include agricultural and subsistence sciences. A landmark moment came in 2013 with the creation of the Tribal Stewardship courses, cementing their commitment to centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership.

The Drumbeats Consortium supports faculty in delivering exceptional curricula in food, agricultural, and natural resource systems, traditional crafts, tribal governance, and science; and directly supports students in their pursuit of higher education. By integrating place-based Indigenous and Western knowledge, Drumbeats aims to create culturally relevant learning experiences that boost student recruitment and retention.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## by project goal

### Grant Objective 1: Amplify Alaska Native knowledge and voice in wild and cultivated food systems, both in education and governance.

The Drumbeats Alaska Consortium made significant strides in amplifying Alaska Native knowledge and leadership across food systems and education. In its third year, this Drumbeats grant continued to expand access to culturally grounded learning in traditional crafts, tribal governance, and subsistence practices. Programs like the Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI) and Applied Arts (APAR) courses fostered academic achievement, cultural continuity, and community resilience, while initiatives such as the Gwich'in Legacy Project and One Health partnerships elevated Indigenous voices in documentation and supported the development of culturally responsive courses and curricula. Participation in statewide conferences and strategic planning sessions further advanced Indigenous governance and visibility in food system decision-making.

### Grant Objective 2: Enhance Alaska Native place-based energy system knowledge and efficiency.

After meeting the grant objective ahead of schedule, the focus in Year 3 shifted from development to sustainment. To solidify the program's success, the Consortium continued to provide dedicated funding for the core components of faculty instruction and student tuition.

# TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Conferences and Educational Opportunities

Drumbeats continued to fund opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to attend various conferences and other learning opportunities.

In 2024/2025, this Drumbeats grant supported travel to and representation at:

- A launch event for the book, *In the Footsteps of the Traveller: The Astronomy of Northern Dene*.
- An in-person visioning session to develop a proposal to build a Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Stewardship (see sidebar)
- The Heritage and Cultural Tourism Conference
- The Alaska Studies Educator Summit
- The 2025 Symposium hosted by the Alaska Tribal Administrators Association and the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association
- The 2024 American Geophysical Union Annual Meeting



Fig. 2. Visual summary to guide creation of Center of Indigenous Knowledge and Stewardship, prepared by Unginax.

## A Dynamic Partnership in Tribal Governance Education

In partnership with Tanana Chiefs Conference, Drumbeats funded a two-part Tribal Governance course series designed to empower the next generation of regional leaders. This special course provided a core cohort of six with a comprehensive foundation in the principles of tribal government, Federal Indian Law, and self-determination. The curriculum was tailored to address the unique history and political landscape of Alaska's Interior, creating a powerful and relevant learning experience.

The course's "learning-in-action" model integrated academic principles with Indigenous ways of knowing, bringing tribal elders and current leaders into the classroom to ground complex legal concepts in lived experience and cultural wisdom. Assignments sent students to engage community members—elders, hunters, and fishers—linking study to sovereignty and stewardship.

The series aimed to strengthen regional leadership capacity, equipping participants with practical skills to navigate tribal law, improve governmental functions, and confidently advance self-governance.

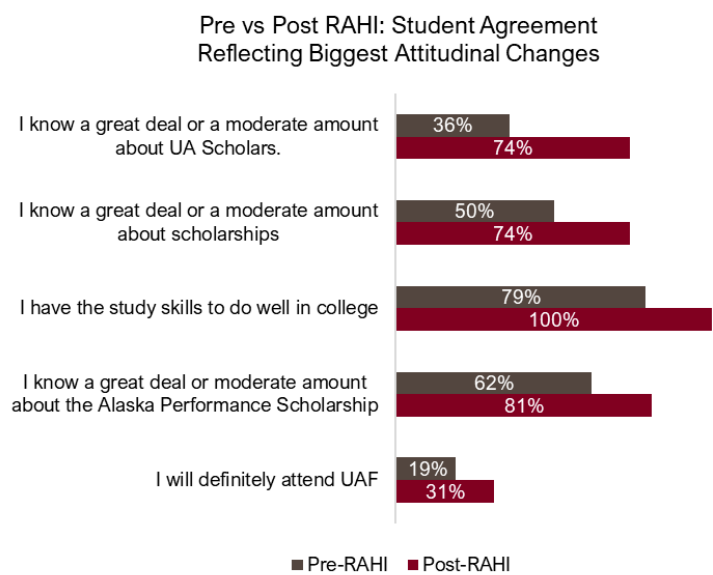


# TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Spotlight on the Rural Alaska Honors Institute

The Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI) is a six-week program that supports Alaska Native and rural students in transitioning to higher education. Since 1983, it has graduated 1,948 students from 232 communities, with 100% high school completion and a 90% increased likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree.

Drumbeats is funding three students to participate in the 2025 RAHI. The program recently served 42 students from 32 communities, offering up to 10 credits across 18 courses, including writing, chemistry, Indigenous studies, and process technology. Students also conducted faculty-mentored research, supported elders, and engaged in land-based learning at Calypso Farm. All completed the program, earning 400 credits and achieving RAHI's highest-ever GPA: 3.82.



In addition to academics, RAHI fosters peer networks and cultural connection while building student confidence, discipline, and resilience. This commitment to developing future leaders aligns with Drumbeats' goals to elevate Alaska Native knowledge and leadership in food systems.

## Kiara's Impact Story

Each summer, 40–50 Alaska Native and rural students trade their vacations to attend RAHI, a six-week intensive college experience. These cohorts grow into a statewide network of peers, colleagues, and friends, forming the human infrastructure for collaboration across Alaska's vast regions. This year, with USDA NIFA ANNH funding, the Drumbeats Alaska Consortium sponsored three students, including Kiara. Surveys showed students gained confidence, broader visions for their futures, and greater resilience. Kiara, now planning to pursue a master's or PhD, reflected, *"Having this experience, it's going to help me a lot in my future and who I become and my education."*



Fig. 4. Kiara in Chemistry lesson at RAHI

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Sarah's Impact Story



Sarah, a 23-year-old UAF student from Shishmaref, Alaska, is using her Drumbeats scholarship to study traditional crafts—skills vital for “keeping our traditions alive.” Raised on Sarichef Island, where subsistence is central, she reflects Drumbeats’ mission to empower Alaska Native students through place-based learning. In three years, Drumbeats has awarded over \$670,000 in scholarships to 1,000+ students, supporting food and energy sovereignty, cultural preservation, and resilience. With USDA-NIFA support, students like Sarah are becoming leaders in sustaining Indigenous lifeways.

## Applied Arts Classes

In Alaska, where communities are remote, small, and predominantly Alaska Native, Drumbeats-supported curriculum and materials use a culturally relevant, place-based approach that integrates Indigenous knowledge into Western academic systems. In partnership with UAF programs such as Applied Arts (APAR), Drumbeats fosters a holistic model that connects language, traditional skills, and subsistence practices.

Applied Arts courses emphasize hands-on learning tied to community resilience. In places with fragile supply chains, skills like skin sewing and basket-making provide practical benefits and reinforce autonomy. During 2024–2025, Drumbeats funding supported three APAR classes—Skin Sewing (Caribou Hair Tufting), Skin Sewing (Grouse Fan), and Introduction to Traditional Crafts (Birch Baskets)—by covering tuition and materials. These courses offered experiential learning that sustains cultural continuity and can support local economies.



*Fig. 5. APAR instructor Bruce Ervin*

## Empowering Elders and Intergenerational Learning

Through Drumbeats support, Alaska Native elders are incorporated into field work and experiential learning opportunities whenever appropriate, allowing for knowledge transfer from elders to students and community members. For example, Drumbeats funded the Center for One Health Research at UAF to interview approximately 70 Alaska Native elders across the State to learn about this concept through an Indigenous lens.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Fig. 6. Diagram showing One Health framework (image credit: UAF)

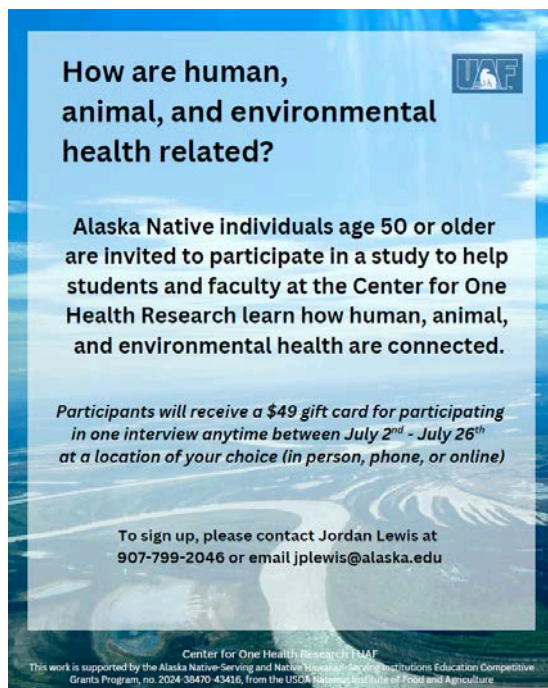


Fig. 7. Alaska Native elder recruitment flyer for One Health research participation

## Spotlight on One Health Research

With support from the Drumbeats Consortium, the UAF Center for One Health Research (COHR) is integrating Indigenous perspectives into the One Health framework—a model linking human, animal, and environmental well-being—by engaging Alaska Native elders.

In summer 2025, COHR hosted a community presentation at Denakkanaaga, a nonprofit that uplifts Native elder voices in Interior Alaska. A UAF student introduced the project and invited elders to join student-led interviews exploring One Health through an Indigenous lens. The event encouraged intergenerational dialogue and gave the student experience in public speaking and culturally respectful engagement.

Elders responded with enthusiasm, asking questions, sharing insights, and signing up for interviews. These ongoing conversations will be analyzed in fall 2025 to inform culturally grounded curriculum design. A key takeaway was the need to return and share findings in person—ensuring transparency and reciprocity. As one staff member said, they hope to “... come back to Fairbanks...present in person...give them a tangible product.”

By centering Indigenous knowledge, this project promotes education that is collaborative, accountable, and rooted in community leadership.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Gwich'in Legacy Project

Drumbeats supported the Gwich'in Legacy Project in the development of film-based educational resources on traditional knowledge, language, and land-based practices. In June 2025, the team produced a new video on traditional willow knowledge and equipped an elder with recording gear for future self-directed documentation. When climate conditions disrupted plans to harvest and film certain plants, the team adapted by recording Gwich'in terminology and planning future shoots—demonstrating resilience and respect for seasonal rhythms.

The project builds on a 14-year collaboration between a Gwich'in elder and UAF faculty member, originally focused on Northern Dene astronomy. Their work has received national attention, including coverage in the *New York Times*, and will be featured in a forthcoming book chapter and PBS/NOVA episode.

Community engagement is growing and public presentations have helped share the project's cultural and educational significance.

At its heart, the Gwich'in Legacy Project honors relationships, empowers Indigenous leadership, and ensures that knowledge carried for generations continues to guide the path forward. The films will serve as educational tools for Alaska Native students, UA faculty, and the broader public.

*“The decision of Elders to participate in Dr. Cannon’s research was part of an ongoing gift to future generations... an act of ‘unconditional love and sacred obligation.’”*

*—Joshua Sokol, NY Times sharing from Mandy Bayha, on the cultural and spiritual dimensions of knowledge sharing*



Fig. 8. Elder Paul Herbert at Shuman House



Fig. 9. Gwich'in elder speaking at book launch event

# LOOKING FORWARD

## Lessons Learned

This year, Drumbeats gained deeper insight into creating lasting impact across Alaska's diverse communities. One key lesson emerged: meaningful progress depends on strong relationships, flexible strategies, and sustained investment. Intergenerational collaboration proved vital—Elders guided students, shaped research, and reinforced cultural continuity. Teams adapted to seasonal and logistical challenges, and students thrived when encouraged to explore identity, tradition, and career goals. Returning research findings to communities remains essential for trust and reciprocity.

The path forward is clear: invest in Alaska Native students, honor Indigenous knowledge, and support the systems that sustain these programs.

## Sustainable Efforts

The Drumbeats Alaska Consortium prioritizes sustainability through targeted investment in student support and faculty development. Its largest impact is direct student support—tuition, supplies, travel, and course development—to expand statewide access and improve retention.

To ensure long-term sustainability, Drumbeats partners within UAF and with external organizations to share resources and expand opportunities for Alaska Native students. Faculty and staff lead programs that integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, strengthening organizational capacity.

Adaptability remains a core strength. Projects like the Gwich'in Legacy and One Health initiatives highlight the value of flexible planning, community reciprocity, and responsiveness to seasonal and logistical challenges. These lessons guide ongoing program design and evaluation.



*Fig. 10. RAHI graduates, 2025*



For more information about Drumbeats Alaska:  
[www.uaf.edu/drumbeats](http://www.uaf.edu/drumbeats)