



Drumbeats Alaska Consortium: Place-Based Solutions for Alaska Native Food & Energy Sovereignty (2023-2026)

2024-2025 Annual Evaluation Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	Executive Summary
06	A Short History
07	Accomplishments
08	Student Support & Retention
09	Curriculum Development
11	Looking Forward

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 second project year of a three-year USDA NIFA ANNH award 2023-38470-40825.

STUDENT IMPACT SNAPSHOT

307

Students received financial support to take college courses

In addition to tuition, students also received the following direct support



Course materials



Travel funding



Mentorship & leadership opportunities

Financial support provided to college students

\$128,067

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.



Bristol Bay Campus (BBC)

Sustainable Energy, Environmental Studies, and Tribal Governance & Stewardship. Located in Dillingham, AK; Serves 43 communities and villages.



Chukchi Campus (CC)

Food Security and Sovereignty. Located in Kotzebue, AK; Serves 11 communities and villages.



Kuskokwim Campus (KuC)

Ethnobotany. Located in Bethel, AK; Serves 55 communities and villages.



Northwest Campus (NWC)

High Latitude Range Management. Located in Nome, AK; Serves 16 communities and villages.



Troth Yeddha' Campus (TYC)

Tribal Governance & Stewardship. Located in Fairbanks, AK; Serves 41 communities and villages statewide.



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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Student Impact Story

Through UAF's Drumbeats program, **Olivia Henaayee Irwin** translated Tribal Governance courses into fisheries practice. Scholarships, mentoring, and weekend classes kept her engaged in academic study while serving her community. Through courses and mentorship from the Drumbeats program and its Principal Investigator, Carrie Stevens, Olivia found her calling in fisheries policy. She pursued a Tribal Governance certificate, focusing on weaving Indigenous knowledge into agency processes. Now, as the Policy Coordinator for the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Olivia champions Tribal co-management and advocates for sound public policy that serves the best interests of Alaska Natives and the lands they steward. Appointed to the Alaska Board of Fisheries effective July 1, 2025, she models Alaska Native leadership in service and place.

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 2 of this award, the consortium continued to provide scholarships to students and introduced new or updated courses to grow and sustain food and energy sovereignty within its service regions.

Highlights of Drumbeats Support in 2024-2025



Financial Support for Students

Grant funds provided support for 307 students to enroll in courses on food and energy sovereignty.



New Curriculum in Sovereignty and Leadership

Drumbeats offered 41 courses exploring food and energy sovereignty and Indigenous leadership, available to the entire student body.



New Ethnobotany Courses Offered

Two new Ethnobotany courses were offered for the first time during the past year.



Enhancing Digital Communication and Outreach

A refresh of the Drumbeats project website and coordinated website/social updates emphasized telling a coherent story of the consortium and its impacts.

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, TYC), 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 Year 2, this grant alone provided \$128,067 in scholarships to 307 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 its first academic programs in 2007. In 2009, Drumbeats expanded its focus to include agricultural and subsistence sciences. A landmark moment came in 2013 with the creation of the Tribal Stewardship courses, cementing its 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 pursuing 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

Goal: Advance place-based Alaska Native food and energy sovereignty through equitable education

The **Drumbeats Alaska: Place-Based Solutions for Alaska Native Food & Energy Sovereignty (2023–26) (ANS 2.0)** project strengthens the viability of Alaska Native communities by: 1) preparing students for place-based employment; 2) increasing food security and sovereignty through education on traditional and modern food practices; and 3) promoting energy efficiency to lower living costs. The project builds local expertise and leadership through training, education, and research in food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences (FANH). Graduates are emerging as leaders who apply Indigenous knowledge to address food and energy security across Alaska.

Grant Objective 1: Increase Alaska Native access to, and equity in, academic pathways related to food and energy sovereignty.

In the second year of this project, grant funds enabled student support and retention efforts for Alaska Native students in the form of scholarships.

Grant Objective 2: Increase Alaska Native opportunities to build technical and leadership skills and knowledge to address food and energy sovereignty and strengthen local economies.

During the 2024-25 academic year, courses related to Alaska Native food and energy sovereignty developed or revised with Year 1 support were offered to all UAF students.

Grant funds were unexpectedly frozen from March 1 to April 30, 2025. The university did not receive notification when the funds became unavailable or when the funds were made available again. Because of this, project implementation proceeded with significant caution for several months.

STUDENT SUPPORT & RETENTION

Student Support

Drumbeats reduces the biggest barrier to college retention—cost—by providing scholarships that cover tuition and course materials, allowing students to enroll and stay enrolled without financial burden. Some participants described scholarships as “the only way” they could take classes, converting long-held interest into action and gaining momentum toward certificates and degrees. Through Drumbeats, funding is paired with practical navigation of university resources and close mentoring, which helps students choose the right courses and feel their lived experience is reflected in the curriculum. Program staff take care with the aid administration because delays in processing can jeopardize retention. Together, timely tuition support, informal advising, and a community-affirming learning environment keep students moving forward—turning access into progress, and progress into completion.

307

Students received financial support to take college courses

\$128,067

Financial support provided to college

Student Impact Story



After spotting UAF Kuskokwim Campus's Ethnobotany program, **Essie Bean** enrolled in the summer intensive and field practice. Here she learned to identify local plants and prepare traditional plant-based products, then sharing results in a presentation to community members. The hands-on, place-based coursework rekindled her love of learning after COVID disruptions, prompting a return to college and enrollment in UAF's undergraduate program in Fisheries and Marine Sciences. The Ethnobotany program linked traditional plant knowledge to community wellbeing and local resource stewardship, showing Essie how science can serve her home region, which made fisheries management a logical next step. In addition to her studies, Essie recently mentored teens as a youth peer monitor with the Science and Culture Camp (see spotlight on next page).

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

New or Updated Courses

The ANS 2.0 project produced new or updated place-based courses across UAF community campuses during its first year in Ethnobotany, Food Security & Sovereignty, High Latitude Range Management, Sustainable Energy, Traditional Crafts and Native Language, and Tribal Governance & Stewardship. During the project's second year, these courses were offered in coordination with harvest seasons and delivered through intensives, fieldwork, and distance formats; elders and leadership/governance content were intentionally woven into instruction. Some curricula also benefited through partnerships with tribal organizations.

2

New courses offered in Ethnobotany

The new Ethnobotany courses offered during the past year included Ethnobotany F120 (Introduction to Edible and Medicinal Plants of Alaska) and F397 (Individual Study: URSA Project).



Fig. 2. Science and Culture Camp 2024 participants

Spotlight on Ethnobotany Program

UAF Kuskokwim Campus's Ethnobotany (EBOT) program bridges Indigenous plant knowledge and academic study. Field and online courses are co-taught with Elders, centering language, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, reciprocity, and relational ethics. Offered as an Occupational Endorsement, EBOT lowers barriers for village-based learners while stacking into an AS concentration or bachelor's minor, giving students culturally grounded skills and clear academic on-ramps. Community engagement is built in: students present final projects publicly, and dual-enrollment courses introduce high-school students to college learning.

Leadership development is embedded: alumni teach EBOT courses, and Bethel's Science & Culture Camp—led by Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC), the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Indigenous Studies (KuC), and the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD)—brings teens into hands-on plant learning while introducing them to natural resource stewardship and management. Drumbeats funding has covered tuition, travel, and supplies.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Spotlight on Sustainable Energy Program

UAF Bristol Bay Campus's Sustainable Energy program bridges energy science and community resilience in rural Alaska. The 12-credit Occupational Endorsement pairs an introduction to sustainable energy with math/trades options and electives (home energy, ventilation, utility internships), creating a clear on-ramp to further study and/or entry-level work. Built for Alaska realities—where energy costs are high—students learn about efficiency and renewables to cut bills and address climate impacts while building employable skills.

Partnerships with K-12 and regional groups deliver practical home-energy classes, while collaborations with statewide initiatives co-produce community energy solutions. Dual-credit (high school and college) opportunities are made available through the Bristol Bay Region Career and Technical Education program. The program also partners with UAF Alaska Center for Energy and Power, as well as high school teachers statewide, to deliver additional classes related to home energy and electric utilities.

New or Updated Courses

Existing courses benefited from updates in curriculum, course materials, and/or format, including some courses translated into asynchronous or synchronous online formats.

41

All updated or new FANH courses supported through Drumbeats



Fig. 3. Bristol Bay Campus heat loss test of campus building using infrared camera in Sustainable Energy course in Dillingham, AK.

LOOKING FORWARD

Lessons Learned

Across the past year, the Drumbeats Alaska Consortium refined how it documents, evaluates, and shares impact. Teams aligned reporting tools with campus work plans and prioritized documenting evidence of Drumbeats' impact on students in addition to project outputs (e.g., courses). Evaluation practice became more student-centered: site visits, interviews, and impact stories were prioritized to capture individual-level impacts and real-world outcomes. Data quality and transparency improved through systematic checks using course and enrollment data obtained from UAF's Office of Planning, Analysis, and Institutional Research.

A refresh of the Drumbeats project website (<https://www.uaf.edu/drumbeats/>) and coordinated website/social media updates emphasized telling a coherent story of the consortium and its impacts.

Financially, the group learned to balance urgency and prudence: spend to meet goals while planning for uncertainty (including an unprecedented freeze of grant funds) and broader college budget pressure; and keep budget forecasting visible at the project and campus levels.



Fig. 4. Graduate from the High Latitude Range Management program at UAF Northwest Campus

LOOKING FORWARD

Sustainable Efforts

The Drumbeats Alaska Consortium prioritizes sustainability through targeted investment in student support and curriculum development. Its largest impact is through student scholarships 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.

Drumbeats' core sustainability strategy is to make curriculum itself durable, stackable, and widely adoptable. Courses are delivered in multiple formats, including field, intensive, and distance formats—an approach that keeps content relevant and transferable across regions and cohorts. Curricula are embedded in stackable credentials and degrees (e.g., Occupational Endorsements), anchoring offerings in the catalog so they persist as program requirements and pathways, not one-off classes.



Fig. 5. Graduate at UAF Chukchi Campus



For more information about Drumbeats Alaska:
www.uaf.edu/drumbeats