

First Alaskans Institute

Denali Commission
Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development
End of Project Summary Report
11/17/2004– 9/30/2006

Project Background

The First Alaskans Institute Leadership Initiative agreement between First Alaskans Institute and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development covered the period from November 17, 2004 through September 30, 2006. The amount of the grant award was \$300,000.

The original intent of the grant was for First Alaskans Institute to provide management and oversight of industry partner intern placements in management level positions. As indicated in the below report, the process evolved into one that allowed for the intern cohorts to receive weekly leadership training which was provided by First Alaskans. Additionally, due to concerns by the partner companies over liabilities, First Alaskans was the employer of record and was responsible for the welfare of the interns throughout the program.

Partner organizations agreed to employ interns for a 10-week period in positions that would expose them to leadership, management, and policy making. The Native community has identified the skills needed by Alaska's upcoming leaders to ensure that future needs are met. The path to Native leadership includes experience and exposure to real world corporate, business, and other organizational situations, an understanding and knowledge of Native values, cultural protocols, and history in order for leaders to be grounded in their own Native identities and origins.

During the past two years with funds provided by the Denali Commission, First Alaskans provided a summer internship program focusing on leadership development for Alaska Native graduate and undergraduate students. Funds from the USDOL were used to supplement the program.

First Alaskans Institute is a statewide, non-profit organization with headquarters in Anchorage, Alaska. Its mission is to help develop the capacities of Alaska Native people and communities to meet educational, economic and social challenges, while fostering positive relationships

among all segments of our society. First Alaskans is a catalyst, convener and supporter of healthy community efforts throughout Alaska and within the Native community.

Project Highlights

The purpose of the project as outlined in the proposal was to provide Alaska Natives with career opportunities in management positions that impact policy and decision making.

The project far exceeded expectations as reflected by the following highlights (and are expanded on later in the report):

- The variety, number, and caliber of employers who chose to place interns in their organizations for the 10-week period
- The quality and diversity of students choosing to participate in this project, from Harvard PhD's to Alaska based Process Technology students
- The highly respected and well-known Alaska leaders who were enthusiastic about presenting at Leadership Fridays when asked
- The larger number of participants than originally anticipated
- The 95% completion rate for the 43 participants funded by this award, during the 2-year grant period
- A total of 69 interns have participated in the First Alaskans Institute intern program (2004, 2005, 2006) with an overall completion rate of better than 95%

Project Organization

First Alaskans Institute's Board of Trustees is comprised of seven former or current Chairpersons or Presidents of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). AFN is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska. Its membership includes 178 villages (both federally recognized tribes and village corporations), 13 regional Native corporations and 12 regional non-profit and tribal consortiums that contract and operate federal and state programs. AFN is governed by a 37- member board which is elected by its membership at the annual convention held each October. The mission of AFN is to enhance the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community.

Byron Mallott (former President of AFN, First Alaskans Institute CEO at the time of the signing of this agreement, and now a Board member) summed up the significance of this leadership program in an article printed in the Anchorage Daily News, Alaska's largest newspaper on April 9, 2006:

"Young Alaska Natives often find themselves "walking in two worlds" - one world consisting of grandparents, ancient languages and subsistence-dependent communities - and the other composed of college degrees, Internet technology and an evolving world economy.

All of us are faced with disorienting change in the modern age; but the sheer distance between the old and the new is nowhere greater than among young Natives, who must bridge millennia of change. Anyone faced with that task needs a place to stand - a sense of identity and self-worth that can combine past and present in a healthy balance.

The 2000 Census showed us that 44.2% of all Native Americans in Alaska had not yet reached their 20th birthdays! The Native population is so young because of a large demographic bubble of children and youth now coming up through the schools and beginning to enter the workforce. What they will do with their adult lives and careers depends on good public education, sound personal choices and the availability of economic opportunity. But the ability to take advantage of such things, when they appear, often depends on an inner sense of oneself and of the people from whom one comes.

Many of today's young Natives have little understanding of their own histories, even about events in the 20th Century. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, for example, was landmark legislation that settled a century-long legal issue of land title and made modern Alaska possible. The same historical importance can be seen in issues like subsistence hunting and fishing, Native public education and local governance in the bush. How can young people be expected to grasp how these complex social issues evolved, unless someone who knows will teach it to them? It is easy to blame Native parents and non-Native school teachers for the resulting knowledge gap, but neither group of adults could have been expected to know all the intricacies of the law.

Last summer, First Alaskans Institute operated a 10-week summer intern program for 32 young Native adults. Each Friday, the interns met with staff and speakers for discussions on many topics: Native and non-Native population, health, economics and education; ANCSA and the Land Claims movement; the roles of tribes; the wisdom of Elders; historical trauma and the need for healing; and the State of Alaska and its remarkable Constitution. To lead the seminars, we brought in leaders who have dedicated their lives to such matters. Our staff came away from the experience feeling that we had given the interns something they had been craving for years. By such means, we Alaska Natives must develop our own next generation of leadership.

The responsibility for teaching the Alaska Native past first falls on us as Natives - through our communities, organizations and leaders. Who else could connect with Native students by speaking in the "we" voice, rather than by saying "they" or "you?" Who else, having worked through such events, would have a better grasp of what actually happened?

There is no reason why each Native region and village in Alaska, through its profit and non-profit institutions, could not spearhead the development of its own local history - because the word "Native" encompasses a broad range of different peoples living in different environments. Such a local body of knowledge could then be taught not only by Natives, but by non-Native teachers who have made the effort to learn about the histories and cultural perceptions of the children they see in the classroom.

If it is the Natives' responsibility to start this cooperative enterprise, it is the role of Alaska's policymakers and educational administrators to recognize the validity of that knowledge, to develop it into a professional curriculum, and to teach it in schools - with the active help of local Native Elders and leaders. This would improve the lives of the students and their families; it would raise the level of Native academic performance; and it would make a better Alaska for

us all.

None of us can learn unless we know who we are.”

This is the essence of what we attempted to do in the two years of the grant, and this report covers the activities and learning environment that were used to impart this knowledge.

Methodology

The program's main component was the placement of interns with employers for a 10-week period from early June to mid-August for each of the two years. The agreement with employers included a Monday through Thursday assignment at their location, with Fridays reserved for intensive leadership development provided by First Alaskans staff. This report is divided into the two calendar and respective program years covered by this grant award. Each of the years', 2005 and 2006, activities have been submitted in the quarterly reports submitted to the AKDOL. They generally include intern and partner recruitment processes, program content and agendas, research products completed by the interns, progress reports and evaluations.

Year 1, 2005 1/1/05-12/31/05

Alaska's economic profile is diverse, with major industries that are seasonal or cyclical in nature such as fishing, tourism, mining, and logging, but in large part, the oil and gas industries have provided the base of Alaska's economy. Alaska's continuing dependence on these industries and the dramatic fluctuations in the price of oil have had an effect on the ability of the state to invest in improving the skills and knowledge of current and future workers, and created a 'skills gap' as evidenced by the combination of labor surpluses and employers' inability to fill many high-skill jobs with Alaskans.

The goal of this project was to impact hiring, training, and retention from a policy level and to influence the perceptions of the business community by adopting high expectations and standards. Alaska Natives' under-representation in all sectors of the economy demanded the many barriers to employment beyond oil and gas be understood. It was also important to recognize the need to provide opportunities in other sectors of the economy that are indirectly connected to oil and gas. When the state's revenue stream is high as a result of high oil prices, there has generally been an increase in employment opportunities in other areas. There is an extreme shortage of workers in the medical and education fields, and these are the positions that are going to be in rural Alaska regardless of the boom and bust cycles of the economy.

The scope of the project was to target Alaska Native candidates who had experience or interest in rural Alaska and the needs of our smaller communities statewide. The priority was to improve their Native hire rates, placement for interns, and employer participants in career fields that are present in rural Alaska. As a result, 12 of the 32 interns were funded by this grant, and the remaining 20 were able to participate with funding from another source.

Additional grant monies contributed to economies of scale, and a scope of work change with British Petroleum provided monies for more intern placements. As a result, an extension request for the grant period was approved to September 30, 2006 which allowed for funds to be used on the new group of interns in 2006.

The second year's program was revamped after reviewing the pilot program in 2004 and that year's small cohort of interns. Upper level college students had advised of their interest to apply their knowledge and gain real world experience in management and leadership.

With more time available, recruitment began in early March for interns and potential placement partners. The program was changed substantially from the previous summer when the interns were housed at First Alaskans the entire time. With a larger group, external placements had to be identified to match their areas of interest.

Nearly 60 job descriptions were submitted by employers for the 12 positions that could be accommodated by this grant. An additional 12 interns were covered by a separate grant. There were upwards of 50 intern applicants. The process used in matching employers with interns included both groups reviewing respective job descriptions and applications, with each prioritizing placements and applicants. Four interns were placed at locations out of Anchorage. This strategy, and the deliberative process, resulted in a 100% retention rate.

An Intern Coordinator was hired after the recruitment process was completed to handle the 32 new hires for the summer (20 of these were DOL interns, the remaining 12 were covered by funding from the Denali Commission). The intern profiles and placements are attached.

A key component of the placements was the Leadership Friday sessions. As noted on the syllabus and Friday agendas, the interns were presented with a variety of information, from learning about the status of Alaska's Natives to understanding what an effective leader is. The program evaluations resulted in some minor changes the following year to include topics such as etiquette.

Following the precedence of the first year's group, two interns researched and produced "*Alaska Native Student Vitality: Community Perspectives on Supporting Student Success*". This report has been presented to a variety of audiences including National Indian Education Association and AREN. The executive summary is included and the entire report is downloadable from First Alaskans website, www.firstalaskans.org

To connect with interns located outside of Anchorage, teleconferences were used during the first half of the program. Interns wanted an opportunity to not only hear the speakers, but to see them too. Halfway through the program, web casting was attempted resulting in a commitment to find a provider for the following year's program that would be able to meet the many challenges of various internet systems and access in Alaska.

The end of season event was an opportunity to recognize the many presenters, the partner companies and others who contributed to the success of the project. The interns planned the

program, designed the certificates they presented to their mentors, and wrote the scripts for their program. They also created a 'yearbook cd' of the highlights of their summer.

One of the agreements with the interns was they would keep First Alaskans apprised of their status in school, employment, or whatever else they might be doing as a part of tracking the participants. First Alaskans is committed to monitoring this on a regular basis in order to communicate leadership and placement opportunities. This is done through e-mails primarily; additionally, a 'leadership.net' newsletter is sent regularly with updates on leadership opportunities. Samples are included.

The evaluations for the summer season reflected an overall score of 4.79 out of a total of 5. The quality of the program is obvious from these scores.

Year 2, 2006
1/1/06-6/30/06

Learning from the experiences of the previous year and from the suggestions made by employers and interns to start the recruitment process earlier, intern recruitment notices were posted prior to the December, 2005 holiday vacation period. The previously hired Intern Coordinator terminated her employment in late January, 2006 after the recruitment notice was placed. This caused a slight delay in the original schedule and reduced the number of planned communications with potential interns and employers. As a result of the earlier closing date and reduced communications, there were a smaller number of intern applicants than the prior year. But, we still received more applications than the 32 positions that could be accommodated. In total, there were nearly 45 applicants received. While there were slightly fewer partner job descriptions submitted than the previous year, we realized a high percentage of partner returnees. Unfortunately, the program was again not able to fill the demand for placements. One intern was terminated from the program within the first month.

A concerted effort was made to recruit more employers outside Anchorage. As a result, 11 interns were placed throughout the state, in Barrow, Kotzebue, Juneau, Dillingham, Sitka, Angoon, St. Mary's, and on the North Slope oilfields. Interns are provided networking opportunities with Alaska's business, policy, and tribal leaders, as well as with employers and fellow interns. Interns have worked on energy and economic development, education, technology, and policy issues.

The interns located outside Anchorage participated in the Leadership Friday sessions via web cast and teleconference. There are still challenges with the web cast service which is being researched in order to provide alternatives for improved service.

The program content was basically the same as the previous year, with some changes to the Leadership Friday sessions. The sessions were moved from First Alaskans' facility in July that caused some logistics challenges, but the program continued to receive overall ratings at above 4.5.

The end of season event, paid for by contributions from employers, again highlighted contributions of the presenters and mentors, and was well received. The program highlights are included.

The leadership.net newsletter is now sent to nearly 950 people. The number of persons interested in receiving it continues to grow, and we expect to have a good response to next year's intern recruitment.

Achievements

In addition to the accomplishments highlighted above and on page two of this report, here are other outcomes from the program:

- As a result of operating the program simultaneous with another grant, there was additional funding for more interns' placements
- The tracking of participants reflects all participants have either returned to school or have been placed in full time positions
- Exposure to what leaders are and how they reached their goals provided an understanding of the sacrifices past leaders have made and a respect for their work that was previously misunderstood
- Employers returned in subsequent years to place interns in their organizations
- With the mindful goal of continuously improving the program through intern and employer weekly and end of summer evaluations and pre and post-meetings and site visits with employers, recruitment, placement, and curriculum adjustments were implemented throughout the program to better meet the needs of participants
- Employers' financial contributions to the program provides optimism the project is sustainable over time
- The research capacity of Alaska's Natives has been increased for the state's research institutions through training and reports produced by the interns in the areas of energy and education
- A proven leadership syllabus attracted non-participants to the session who were welcomed to attend
- A variety of web casting companies were researched to determine how to best serve interns placed in rural locations with varying levels of internet access
- The stereotypes of the Alaska Native workforce was reduced with the broader employment community beyond Native organizations
- Participants have a greater understanding of why conditions exist across the globe for indigenous peoples that provided thoughtful discussion about how to resolve them
- The program created a greater awareness about pride in culture and oneself and the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from and the connection to the future and survival of the culture
- There is increased recognition of the important role of organizations and the individuals in them to give back to community
- There is increased communications beyond the summer program as a result of the interns' innovative ideas and suggestions (e.g. on-line forums, meetings throughout the year whether in person or telecom or electronically)

Lessons Learned

- There is a real desire and need to teach not just these groups of interns, but everyone about their histories to know why things are the way they are and what has to be done to resolve them
- Continuous improvement and taking feedback seriously and acting on it creates quality programs
- Creating opportunities for dialogue between Elders and youth, urban and rural, and with others in the community confirms that 'we're all in this together'
- Due diligence in the selection process has huge rewards in retention and contentment for all partners
- Advance recruitment and communications is key
- There is still much work to do on the technology end for quality connections for those who can't participate in person in order to increase participation with other locations
- There is great value in having a diverse group, and mixing the groups
- There needs to be more collaboration with other programs
- Interns want more time to discuss issues
- Providing opportunities for these talented young people opens doors for them that wouldn't otherwise be there
- Have a variety of ways of teaching to reach all learners; have a mix of site visits, art, acting, participatory presentations is key
- There needs to be more regular contact with the participants beyond the program to insure they are getting the support needed for placements, etc.
- More organizations need to take this kind of program on themselves and invest in the talent that's ready to work and contribute
- Employers are willing to provide opportunities and contribute to good projects
- Leaders are waiting to be asked to present and share their knowledge and expertise
- Rural communities want to participate
- Lifelong relationships have been developed as a result of this project

This has been a wonderful experience for First Alaskans Institute, and we are grateful to have had this opportunity to impact the lives of the many people who participated in this. Thank you.