

**DENALI COMMISSION**  
**GRANT AWARD PRESENTATION**  
**TO COMMISSIONERS**

via Zoom videoconference  
Anchorage, Alaska

**August 21, 2023**

**MINUTES**

PRESENT:

**Commissioners Present**

Garrett Boyle, Federal Co-Chair  
Tyson Gallagher, State Co-Chair  
Alicia Amberg  
Joelle Hall  
Nils Andreassen  
Pat Pitney

**Absent**

Julie Kitka

**Staff/Others Present**

Jocelyn Fenton, Director of Programs  
Erik Obrien, Program Manager  
Katy Conway, Program Manager  
Kristin Reardon, Program Manager  
Liza Mack, Program Manager  
Nikki Navio, Program Manager  
John Whittington, General Counsel  
Anne Stanislowski, Administrative Officer  
Betty Caudle, Kron Associates

**CALL TO ORDER**

Federal Co-Chair Garrett Boyle called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. A quorum was established.

## **GRANT AWARDS OVERVIEW**

Federal Co-Chair Boyle stated that for the 2023 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) the Commission had \$34.8 million available. We received 219 applications. After a review to make sure the applications met the established criteria, we ended up with 197 eligible applications for a requested total of \$163.5 million.

A lot of requests came in for transportation projects, both surface and waterfront areas. Lots of requests for health and wellness, community buildings, energy, housing, water, and sanitation. Smaller requests were made for economic development and workforce development as well as village infrastructure program (VIP).

Our final recommendations were just under \$34 million for 75 projects. We're doing work in 56 different communities plus projects with regional and statewide impacts. Federal Co-Chair Boyle then turned the meeting over to staff for the grant award presentations.

## **TRANSPORTATION - Nikki Navio**

In 2023, close to \$15 million was awarded for projects. Ms. Navio highlighted three below.

**Cordova South Harbor Reconstruction Project** - this harbor hasn't been updated or improved in over 40 years. The Denali Commission is helping with some gap funding for the project. This reconstruction project has a lot of community support and is to start construction this year.

**Allakaket Village New Subdivision Road Project** - \$2 million was granted for the design and construction of a half mile gravel road as part of a planned development project to build homes so residents can relocate from the 100 year flood plain that they live in now. Once this road is in place, village residents will be able to seek additional funding in the future to build new homes and other roads for this relocation process.

**Koliganek to Aleknagik Road Study** - This is a feasibility study looking at regional connectivity for the communities Koliganek, Ekwok, New Stuyahok, and Aleknagik. The project is for these communities to reach Aleknagik, which has road access to Dillingham. For village residents, this connectivity will increase access to health care, job opportunities, essential services, and community resiliency overall.

## **ENERGY PROJECTS - Katy Conway**

Ms. Conway stated that the Denali Commission received about 30 applications for various energy projects. We were able to fund five of them for a total of \$3.7 million. She added that through partnerships with BIA and USDA, the Denali Commission was able to fund three additional projects. She highlighted three of the eight 2023 projects below.

**Solar Array Design/Engineering and PPA/IPP Frameworks** - This project received \$112,000 for solar design engineering for a small solar array in Akhiok in Kodiak. This application builds off work that's already been done, including a strategic energy plan and a rural power system upgrade that the Commission helped previously fund.

The design and engineering of the solar array will help the community prepare for a shovel ready project that hopefully will make them more eligible for grant funding to construct the solar array in the future.

In addition to the design, this grant also provides guidance for the legal and business frameworks for creating independent power producer and power purchase agreements. The solar array will assist residents transition off diesel with a locally renewable energy source. So, instead of spending their dollars on fuel from outside the community, they will retain dollars in their local community, which will help improve community resilience.

**Nulato Biomass Project Gap Funding (ANTH)** - Approximately \$725,000 was awarded to gap fund the design and construction of a biomass heating project in Nulato. USDA is also funding \$1 million through its rural utility service program. It is anticipated that jobs will be created for local residents during the construction phase, and the ongoing operation of the plant.

Instead of purchasing 25,000 gallons of fuel at \$6.80 per gallon (as of 8/21/23) from outside their area to heat their homes, this project will allow the residents to keep their money within the community thus improving their independence and resiliency.

**Naknek Electric Renewable Energy Project** - The Naknek Electric Association serves Naknek, South Naknek and King Salmon. They have a distribution system that is more than 30 years old and has a 25-year life expectancy. So, well beyond the time anyone expected it to be around.

These communities have done a lot of work upgrading their system over the years and exploring different renewables. For example, they have a 10-year plan to develop wind. But they need to upgrade their distribution system and the switch gear in the diesel powerhouse, so they are ready to integrate with renewable energy. Upgrading distribution alone has huge reliability and resilience benefits for the community, as well as efficiency. So, the primary benefit of this project is making their energy safer, more reliable, and probably a little bit cheaper. But the bigger picture is for them to be ready in the long-term when they develop their renewable energy projects.

## **BROADBAND; HOUSING; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT; ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - Erik Obrien**

Mr. Obrien stated that while his projects are on the smaller side, there are good reasons for that, and they are important projects.

**Tribal Library Computer Network (Broadband)** - \$150,000 was awarded to AFN for this project in western Alaska. It is a fairly simple, fairly straightforward small investment in some Starlink satellite hardware, and computing tools, such as computers and printers, and it creates a long-term funding mechanism for these communities. In addition, because internet is so expensive in our rural communities, it provides a public access point for residents to use the internet.

**Rural Housing/Sweat Equity Program (Housing)** - RuralCap is a facilitator who brings together communities, tribes, entities, builders and so on. They have a proven history of pairing people on the ground with various programs that exist and leveraging resources.

This program brings homebuilders together with sweat equity participants and to provide technical assistance and to train them on skills needed to frame the house, plumb the house, wire the house and so on. Even though there will be technical people involved, the homeowner is the builder. This method brings down the overall cost of building homes. This current project is focused on Bethel and another medium-sized community. The goal is to have this program statewide.

**From Poverty to Prosperity (Workforce Development)** - NineStar works with people experiencing poverty, joblessness, homelessness, and so on by providing them with direct checks, education, or workforce training. Over time, these people using NineStar services tend to move away from poverty and homelessness.

Currently, NineStar operates in urban areas, such as Anchorage, Wasilla, and Juneau. They want to expand their services into rural Alaska. This project will help them operate in Chickaloon and other rural outlying areas in the Mat-Su region. This way it is easier to make the transition from an urban setting into a rural one easier.

**Chilkat Valley Outdoor Recreation Initiative (Economic Development)** - Haines is a beautiful little community and they want to focus on their natural assets, their mountains, their extreme sports, skiing, snow machining, and then hiking, biking, and walking. This project will allow them to hire a director to expand on their grass roots efforts to build their trail networks and huts around their community.

While they benefit from tourists on cruise ships, they want to pursue developing slow tourism for people that want to get out and spend days and time in the community. The people will rent houses, rent bikes, rent snow machines, and go on ski adventures. And they will spend their dollars in the community while they're out adventuring. The strategy of having one person devoted to trail development has proven successful in other communities. It is capacity building, a strong return on investment, leverage, and sustainability.

## **VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION (VIP) PROGRAM - Liza Mack**

**Master Relocation Implementation Plan** - the Denali Commission awarded \$200,000 to Kivalina so they can complete their community master plan. Once this plan is complete, they can seek grants from other agencies and organizations to help them relocate their village. The Denali Commission has worked with Kivalina over the years to develop their community master plan. A few years ago, their school moved to Kisimigiqtuq Hill (K-Hill). So, they want to finalize the Master Plan to move the rest of their community up there.

## **SANITATION PROGRAM; HEALTH FACILITIES PROGRAM AND VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM - Kristin Reardon**

Ms. Reardon stated that sanitation means water, wastewater, and solid waste. There are lots of opportunities for the Commission to participate meaningfully in solid waste projects. For the health facilities program, we've expanded this program to include wellness more generally, not just clinics. And she also manages the victim services program.

**Unmet Waste Management Needs of Rural Alaska** - this project is for various, small scale solid waste management projects throughout Alaska. They're unfunded by the Indian Health Service, EPA, and USDA. By funding these small projects, we reduce the risks to drinking water, local subsistence resources, and human health. And they also improve community aesthetics. We'll see small scale improvements throughout the state as part of this project.

**Community Wellness Facility Repairs** - We are in the planning stages for repairs to an alcohol and drug treatment facility in Ekwok, Alaska. This is a tribal facility that offers culturally appropriate treatment and increases family resilience in the face of addiction. We're hopeful that over time it will decrease substance misuse rates. This project is one example of a project within the health and wellness program where we've expanded beyond explicitly health clinics.

**Mary C. Demientoff Subregional Health Center** - This project is funded for \$2 million to construct a sub-regional health center located in Nenana in partnership with TCC. The new clinic will provide comprehensive health care in the region.

**Nuniatq Community and Tsunami Center** - This project is to construct a multi-purpose building in the tsunami safety zone in Old Harbor on Kodiak Island. There are lots of uses for this community building, including an emergency operating center and an emergency shelter.

**HVAC and Energy Upgrades for Buckland School** - This project upgrades the HVAC at the school, which will reduce costs to the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, provide a more consistent school learning environment and an emergency shelter for the community.

**Victim Services Program** - The \$7 million provided by the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crimes that came over to the commission is now fully committed. Our DOJ partner spent the week with Ms. Reardon and staff of the Denali Commission. So, that's a great relationship and we hope to continue to participate.

Commissioners had no questions and thanked staff for their brief overview of the 2023 FOA grants. It was nice to have some tangible examples of the projects that are being funded.

Federal Co-Chair Boyle stated that he will email today's presentation and his original memo detailing all of the 2023 projects to commissioners later today. He then adjourned the meeting at 4:31 p.m.