

**Kuskokwim River Middle Mile Fiber Technical Feasibility Study  
RD-RU-COOP-25-09**

**Community Outreach**

Prepared for:  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Rural Utility Services

Prepared by:  
Mark Ayers, PE  
Ayers Telecom Consulting, LLC  
Anchorage, Alaska

and  
Dave Tucker, Barb Combs  
Meridian Management Inc.  
Anchorage, Alaska

and  
John Seigle, Zach Huff  
ABR, Inc. – Environmental Research & Services  
Anchorage, Alaska

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## Engaging with the local communities

Community outreach and stakeholder engagement in the planning, development, and execution of projects in rural Alaska is paramount to project success. The goal is to ensure that the needs, concerns, and feedback of local stakeholders are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and support for the project. The Kuskokwim River has several community and tribal groups that influence the culture and policies in the region. These groups include Aniak, Chuathbaluk and McGrath community councils, The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC), McGrath Native Village Council, Alaska Native regional corporations. Calista Corporation and Doyon Limited. Project engagement is accomplished through stakeholder identification and interest analysis, intentional communication planning and education efforts.

## Key stakeholders and their interests

The first step in establishing a connection with the local communities is a survey of the stakeholders within the region. These stakeholders include area residents, businesses, community groups, tribal organizations, native corporations and government agencies. The influence and presence of each of these entity types varies by region and community in rural Alaska. Each identified stakeholder is analyzed to understand their individual interests and concerns. These interests are compared with the project's objectives and any identified collaboration opportunities or conflicts are noted so that they can be addressed. The project award's scope limits the team's stakeholder identification efforts to focus primarily on the communities of Aniak, Chuathbaluk, and McGrath.

## Stakeholders are identified using a variety of methods

In order to determine the appropriate stakeholders within each community, a multi-pronged approach is employed that includes a variety of identification methods.

- *Internet searches.* A basic web search is conducted using keywords to identify and document regional and local stakeholders in the areas of interest.
- *Social media review.* Many rural community members use social media platforms to discuss important regional topics and concerns. A review of identified social media accounts and posts is conducted to capture this content.
- *Community knowledge.* General and specific individual knowledge of the community members and interest areas is used to identify individuals or groups not present in social media or readily located in internet searches.
- *Referrals.* Regular contact with already identified stakeholder groups can result in referrals to other stakeholders or groups.

The stakeholder identification process exposed a clear pattern that enabled the project team to develop and apply a consistent engagement approach. Small community population size results in stakeholders frequently serving in multiple capacities across broader stakeholder groups. This pattern of behavior results in strong interconnectedness throughout the community and region. These observations produce a focused target audience group.

- *Local Native corporations.* Organizationally these can involve one or many villages, towns or cities in the area of interest.
- *Local tribal or traditional councils.* Council can be associated with one or many villages, towns or cities within the area.

- *Regional corporations.* Both local and regional Native corporations may be affiliated with the region and one another. Board and council members can serve both at the local and regional levels.
- *Local government.* Structure and influence of local government members differs from community to community. For example, a city mayor could also serve as Tribal Chief or the local Native corporation President.

### Stakeholder analysis produces focused messaging

Engagement messaging with the primary stakeholders is based on the review of their individual interests and concerns. Table 1 outlines the identified stakeholders and their primary areas of interest.

**Table 1. Kuskokwim River fiber-optic cable study stakeholder analysis results**

| <b>Tribal councils<sup>1</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Emphasis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aniak Traditional Council</li> <li>• Chuathbaluk Tribal Council</li> <li>• McGrath Native Village Council</li> </ul>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and representation</li> <li>• Cultural and environmental stewardship</li> <li>• Consultation and decision-making</li> <li>• Tribal advocacy</li> <li>• Deep local, historical, and geographical knowledge</li> </ul> |
| <b>Local and regional native corporations</b>                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Emphasis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Kuskokwim Corporation<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• MTNT, Ltd (McGrath)</li> <li>• Calista Corporation (Regional)</li> <li>• Doyon, Limited (Regional)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic development</li> <li>• Management of tribal assets</li> <li>• Profit distribution</li> <li>• Business ventures</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| <b>City government (including public works)</b>                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Emphasis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City of Aniak</li> <li>• The City of McGrath</li> </ul>                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local governance and policy making</li> <li>• Budget and resource allocation</li> <li>• Community representation</li> <li>• Oversight and accountability</li> </ul>                                                             |
| <b>Local residents</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Emphasis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent population</li> <li>• Transient or seasonal population</li> </ul>                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining subsistence lifestyle and culture</li> <li>• Employment and educational opportunities</li> <li>• Broadband service quality</li> <li>• Cost and quality of services</li> </ul>                                       |

### Effectively delivering the broadband connectivity message to communities

Engaging with community members requires the project team to develop and execute a communications plan. This plan must meet the needs of each group while delivering the message in a manner that resonates with their members. The table below outlines the communication plan used to perform outreach on behalf of the Kuskokwim River project team.

**Table 2. Community outreach communication plan for Kuskokwim River feasibility study**

<sup>1</sup> Based on our discussion with stakeholder groups the most effective avenue for reaching the broader community is through the tribal councils.

<sup>2</sup> Stakeholders with whom we were able to meet via video conference are noted above. Other stakeholders have been contacted multiple times by email and phone, and we continue working toward scheduling video conference meetings with them as well.

| Message content                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Recipient(s)                                                                                                                                            | Method                                                                                                                      | Timing              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Initial outreach</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial stakeholder contact</li> <li>Stakeholder relationship specialist introduction</li> <li>Project overview</li> <li>Consultation meeting invitation advance notice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tribal councils</li> <li>City government</li> <li>Village corps.</li> <li>Regional corps.</li> </ul>             | E-mail                                                                                                                      | Aug 2025            |
| <b>Consultation meeting(s)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal presentation of project</li> <li>Question and answer</li> </ul>                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tribal councils</li> <li>City government</li> <li>Village corps.</li> <li>Regional corps.</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Video Conference</li> <li>Phone (where video was unavailable)</li> </ul>             | Oct 2025 – Jan 2027 |
| <b>Draft study findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present draft feasibility study findings</li> <li>Collect community feedback</li> </ul>                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tribal councils</li> <li>Local and regional native corps.</li> <li>City government</li> <li>Residents</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project website</li> <li>Tribal council meetings</li> <li>Public meetings</li> </ul> | Feb 2026 – Jan 2027 |
| <b>Comment period</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft findings 30-day comment period</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                    | All                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project website</li> <li>Tribal council meetings</li> <li>Public meetings</li> </ul> | Apr 2026            |
| <b>Written response to comments</b>                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue response letters to received comments</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             | All                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project website</li> <li>Tribal council meetings</li> <li>Public meetings</li> </ul> | Jun 2026            |

### Tailored Messaging

Stakeholder groups generally include organized bodies such as tribal councils, city boards, and corporations. Audiences are often comprised of executives, community leaders, technical teams, administrative staff, and—in some cases—third-party participants invited by the stakeholder group. Messaging, both content and delivery, is tailored to match the audience and interest of each stakeholder.

### Strategies for soliciting community involvement

Incorporating feedback from community members requires the *project* team to provide engagement forums in a format that is constructive. This is accomplished through the use of *multiple* media types.

### Information sharing through public meetings and workshops

Meetings and workshops are used to disseminate information, answer questions and gather interactive feedback from residents. Tribal and traditional councils typically hold monthly

meetings, during which they reserve a portion of their agenda for public comment and our presentations were usually incorporated into this portion of their agenda. In these settings, the council controlled both the agenda and the composition of the audience, providing the broadest opportunity to reach community members. Community sentiment was a blend of enthusiasm and caution, influenced by both historical and ongoing challenges related to broadband connectivity. A consistent message was delivered to the project team, there is a strong desire for high-speed broadband that is reliable, fairly priced, and capable of meeting the needs of modern users.

Meetings with corporations and city governments were scheduled individually and focused specifically on introducing the project. Questions from these audiences centered on economic development potential within the communities. The project team was encouraged by the openness of the organizations. In sharing previous efforts, experiences, and studies related to broadband expansion the project team gained insight into how to best meet the community's needs. These stakeholders are eager to see high speed connectivity deployed and clearly recognize its importance for supporting essential community infrastructure in the 21st century.

### **Data collection using surveys and questionnaires**

Surveys and questionnaires are an effective way to gather empirical feedback by administering the same set of questions to each group. It also allows community members to provide feedback outside of the public sessions which maintains privacy and anonymity.

### **Focus groups allow specific groups to be heard**

Key stakeholders are engaged to offer their insights using focus group sessions. This allows targeted issues to be addressed in the right forum of individuals within a community. Focus group meetings have been held with different groups. During these sessions the team conducted in depth discussions to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the community group's primary concerns, priorities, and expectations.

#### **Focus Group: The City of Aniak**

The project team met with representatives from the City of Aniak. The community group included the mayor, administrative staff, and board members. A high level overview of the project was presented after which the team held a question-and-answer session. Community members raised one significant point of concern related to an ongoing local exchange fiber optic project. The council asked how this initiative differed from that effort. This was a valuable observation, as it underscored the need to strengthen the project's messaging when discussing not only the Kuskokwim River fiber-optic cable project but also other regional broadband projects. The community and surrounding region have been involved in numerous broadband connectivity initiatives over the years—each unique and targeted in its own way yet often described in generic terms resulting in confusion among community members. Concerns such as this one should be addressed directly and transparently. Any project(s) that are causing confusion in the community must be understood and explained in terms easily understood by residents, even if they are unrelated to the proposal being advanced by the project team.

**Focus Group: The Kuskokwim Corporation** TKC represents the communities of Lower Kalskag, Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Napaimute, Crooked Creek, Georgetown, Red Devil, Sleetmute, and Stony River. TKC serves as a central voice for the region and its community members. The project team met with the TKC leadership team and provided a project overview. After the presentation the team solicited feedback and comments to gain insight into local needs and long-term goals. TKC expressed a strong awareness of the critical importance of broadband connectivity and the challenges their communities face due to limited access. They

shared the results of a recent analysis TKC conducted on bringing fiber to the home in their administrative area. In addition to offering a comprehensive set of findings from that study, TKC invited the project team to access further information about the communities, the Kuskokwim River, and local fish habitat. Throughout the discussion, TKC was transparent and clear about their priorities, emphasizing the need to improve economic outcomes for their stakeholders. The project team greatly appreciate the openness and willingness to collaborate, which will support informed decision making and better project outcomes.

### **Focus Group: The City of McGrath**

A focus group was held with representatives from the City of McGrath, including the Mayor, the Administrator, and a board member. The project team provided an overview of the feasibility study and encouraged open dialogue. The concerns raised by the City team aligned closely with those expressed by other stakeholders and led to a productive, collaborative conversation. During the meeting, the City shared information about a hydroelectric power study currently underway and offered to provide the project team with the results. This data is particularly valuable given its focus on the rivers and streams in the upper Kuskokwim River region. City representatives were engaged and inquisitive, asking thoughtful questions and expressing a clear interest in continued communication as the finished study is prepared for publication.

### **Information dissemination through multiple media types**

Information about the project and other broadband access initiatives must rely on community engagement to remain informed and knowledgeable. Dissemination of project information is achieved through several outlet types. The Kuskokwim River fiber-optic cable project maintains a website with information on the project's progress, timelines, and key documents. The project website serves as the media hub for project updates, resources and announcements. This content is live and updated on a quarterly basis. The project website can be reached at <https://kuskokwimfiber.com/>.

### **Notifications provide personalized updates to community members**

The use of social media and electronic mail systems (e.g. e-mail) to provide updates to community members is a fundamental component of the community outreach program. The study group used a combination of e-mail notifications containing pertinent information such as website details, introductory content about the project and expectations for future contact. To date, the City of Aniak is the only community organization we have identified that uses social media to share information with their members. The community of McGrath uses an electronic community board to share information with the community. The board appears to be highly interactive and time relevant. The remote nature of the communities limits the value and effectiveness of providing notifications through traditional newsletters and physical media. These media types are expensive and become stale quickly. For that reason, the project team chose not to use physical media as part of the outreach communications strategy. Access to community members has been largely facilitated through engagement with community serving entities such as the city government, Tribal or Traditional council, and the local and regional Alaska Native corporations. These entities maintain a broad reach within their respective communities through regularly scheduled council and board meetings. These meetings provide a forum where residents and businesses can express their opinions, concerns or provide comments by requesting items of interest to be placed on the agenda. These organizations are consistently involved in community life through activities such as high school sporting events, community potlucks, holiday celebrations, and seasonal festivals. This ongoing involvement positions them as key partners in disseminating information and supporting community engagement efforts. Press releases and technical articles represent a formal method for releasing information and disseminating content to the public. The project team collaborated

with SubTel Forum Magazine to develop a short article for publication in the spring of 2026 which details initial findings and project content.

### **Feedback tools allow community voices to be heard**

Community feedback is critical to ensuring that the messaging delivered is being received and that community members desiring to provide feedback are heard. Feedback is collected through formal comment periods and information e-mail requests. The project team found that flexibility in planning was important to ensure that the stakeholders were represented and engaged. Responses are provided both interactively in direct engagements and through e-mail in the case of written feedback requests. Following the initial publication of the draft report on the project website a 30-day comment period is opened to provide community members with a formal mechanism to provide feedback.

### **Outreach monitoring provides a health check on engagement status**

Project outreach activities are tabulated and recorded in a centralized repository. This allows the status and performance of the outreach activities to be tracked and measured through the life of the project. The repository contains a variety of key stakeholder details along with chronological notes indicating dates and times of communication. The chronological records should contain dates, methods of contact used, a record of response and notes detailing any required follow-up. A sample format for outreach monitoring is provided in Table 3 along with sample values.

**Table 3. Outreach monitoring content tracking sample format**

|                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Community or town name | Aniak                         |
| Entity type            | City government               |
| Entity name            | City of Aniak                 |
| Mailing address        | Address or lot / block number |
| Phone number           | xxx-xxx-xxxx                  |
| E-mail                 | xxx@yyy.com                   |
| Website                | xxx-aniak.com                 |

Two examples of outreach tracking are provided below. The first illustrates a successful connection with a community member while the second reflects an ongoing but unsuccessful effort to establish contact with a community. Staffing levels vary significantly across community organizations: some operate with full time personnel, while others have limited staff due to a variety of factors, often tied to the size and capacity of the community. These differences naturally impact response times and the ease of coordination.

**Figure 1. Sample outreach record showing contact with TKC**

|                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| President/CEO Andrea Gusty                                                                                                                                                        |
| 08.27.25 - BC sent email and introduction letter to email address and addressed to Andrea Gusty                                                                                   |
| 08.27.25 - Received email response back from Andrea Gusty, they are looking forward to learning more and welcome the opportunity to collaborate.                                  |
| 10.20.25 - BC sent follow up email to see about setting up video call. Heard back from Andrea, she said they are not available this week, but could find time next week.          |
| 10.24.25 - BC sent email asking for a couple of days/times that works for them; also, letting her know it would only be about an hour and I could set up the Teams Video meeting. |
| 10.28.25 - Met with TKC board members, Andrea Gusty, Will Hartman and Megan Leary                                                                                                 |
| 11.17.25 - BC sent email to Megan Leary (VP of Operations) regarding Kuskokwim River information that TKC offered to share in our meeting with them.                              |
| 11.26.25 - BC sent follow-up email to Megan Leary                                                                                                                                 |
| 2.18.26 - Sent Andrea, Megan and Will and email announcing the new website launch.                                                                                                |

### **Figure 2. Failed outreach attempt with Chuathbaluk city council**

President: Teresa M. Simeon-Hunter both village council and village corp. have the same contact email and phone info.  
8.27.25 - BC sent email and introduction letter to email address and addressed it to Teresa Simeon-Hunter  
10.17.25 - BC forwarded email to: ctc.tracysimeon@gmail.com (this was an additional email provided by Andrea Gusty of the KNA)  
11.03.25 - BC called, ring no answer. Followed up with email to confirm good phone number.  
12.1.25 - BC, sent email to Tracy  
12.15.25 - Called, ring no answer.  
12.15.25 - note: up until this point I have been calling the 907-467-4313 number, which has not worked. Using a list of contacts and numbers that TKC provided, I am now trying 907-457-2120.  
12.15.25 - Called 907-457-2120, spoke with Kathy Phillips (ctc.kathyphillips@gmail.com), she said they have a council meeting scheduled for the 23rd of December and they can put us on the agenda for either public comment or voice of the people. I said I would follow up with email and she will send us a Zoom link.  
12.17.25 - Sent Kathy an email letting her know that if the council meeting is before 3 pm on 12.23.25 we can attend, and if afterwards we will have to aim for the next monthly meeting to present. Awaiting a response back.  
12.17.25 - Kathy confirmed we will be placed on 'voices to be heard' portion of agenda, starting at 10 am. She will send a zoom meeting invite.  
12.23.25 - On standby for call to be added to meeting, emailed twice during the 1.5 hours on standby, but was unsuccessful in connecting and eventually dropped from the call.  
12.26.25 - Sent email to Kathy asking if we can be added to the next monthly council meeting and if she can tell me how long it will go I can make sure we are on standby the entire time - to be added to 'people to be heard' section of the agenda when they are ready.  
2.19.26 - sent email to Kathy at ctc.kathyphillips@gmail.com and chuathtradcouncil@gmail.com re; new website launch announcement

### **Regular project progress reporting maintains forward motion**

Bi-weekly project status meetings are held for team members to provide project updates. During these meetings outreach progress and stakeholder updates are provided to the entire project team. The meeting attendees include the project engineer, project manager, stakeholder relationship specialist, environmental consultant and construction manager. During the meeting each team member communicates progress and status. Outreach activities are discussed with the group and the contents of the discussions are documented.

### **Conflict identification and resolution are critical outreach functions**

The project team has taken a consistent approach to conflict management centered on active listening and thoughtful consideration regarding stakeholder concerns. Most engagements have occurred through video-conference and teleconference meetings where stakeholders were available and willing to participate. Open, well-informed dialogue is supported during these discussions with relevant materials and background information provided in advance of the meeting via email. Providing early access to important materials allowed stakeholders adequate time to review the information and prepare questions or comments. This approach has proven effective and the conversations have been highly interactive, with stakeholders presenting well-considered questions and demonstrating clear engagement with the subject matter. When areas of disagreement or uncertainty arise, facilitation techniques that encourage constructive exchange and identify common ground are used. This practice supports collaborative problem-solving and helps ensure that stakeholder perspectives are meaningfully incorporated into the process.

### **Continuous improvement results in optimized outreach**

Successful outreach is reliant on regular evaluation of performance and adaptation to changing methods and requirements in the face of new information. Continuous improvement is facilitated

through regular evaluations of the effectiveness by examining outreach activities and noting weaknesses. The remote nature of the communities in the study area limit two-way engagement. This causes communications to be primarily focused on email, telephone, and video conferencing methods. These direct engagement techniques are supplemented by the project website which allows stakeholders to access information and provide input at their convenience. Engagement strategies are adjusted as circumstances evolve and stakeholder needs change, ensuring that outreach efforts remain responsive and effective. Effective community outreach ensures that stakeholders are informed, involved, and supportive of the project, leading to more successful and sustainable outcomes.