Alaska Resource & Tribal Infrastructure Coordination (ARTIC) Project

Listening Sessions Summary Report

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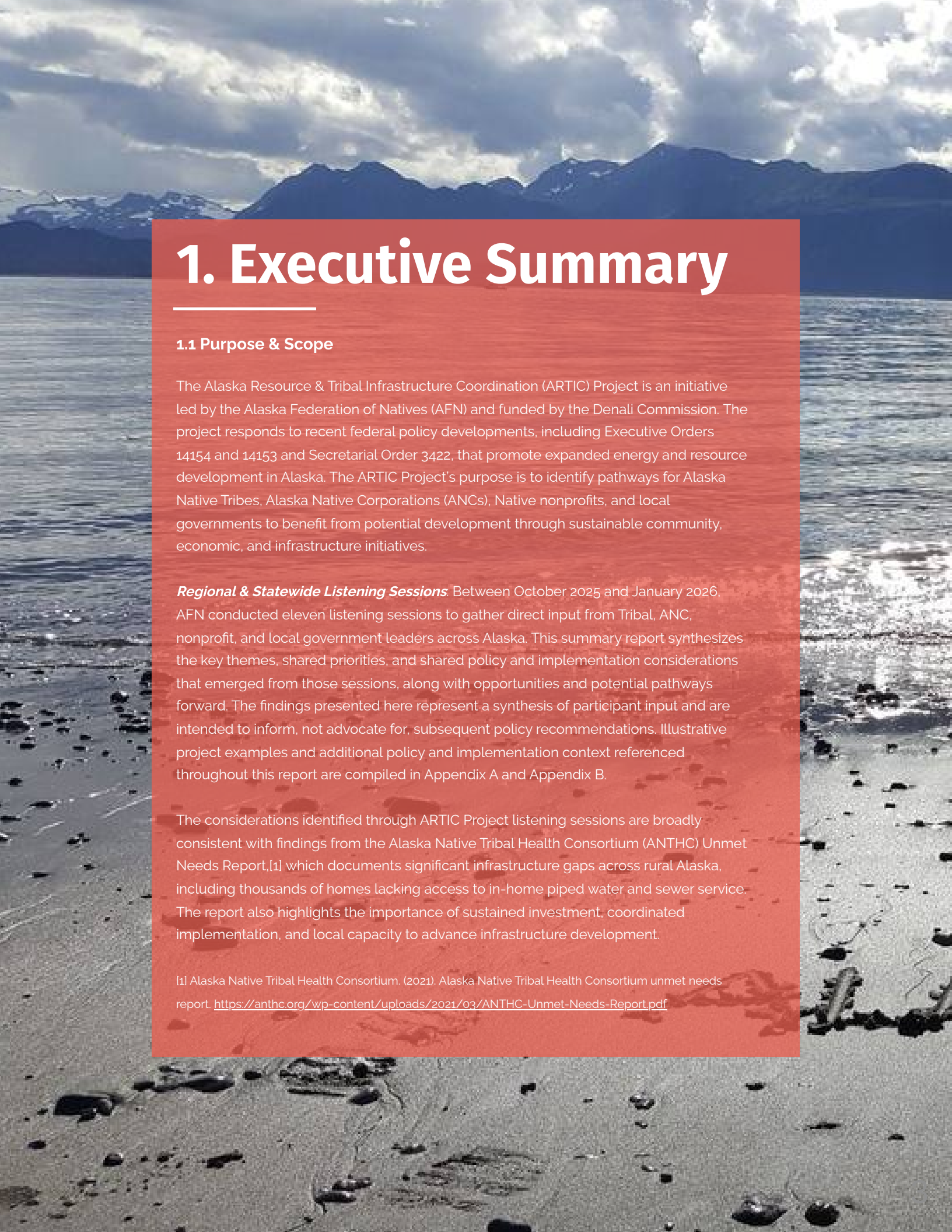


1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose & Scope

The Alaska Resource & Tribal Infrastructure Coordination (ARTIC) Project is an initiative led by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and funded by the Denali Commission. The project responds to recent federal policy developments, including Executive Orders 14154 and 14153 and Secretarial Order 3422, that promote expanded energy and resource development in Alaska. The ARTIC Project's purpose is to identify pathways for Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), Native nonprofits, and local governments to benefit from potential development through sustainable community, economic, and infrastructure initiatives.

Regional & Statewide Listening Sessions: Between October 2025 and January 2026, AFN conducted eleven listening sessions to gather direct input from Tribal, ANC, nonprofit, and local government leaders across Alaska. This summary report synthesizes the key themes, shared priorities, and shared policy and implementation considerations that emerged from those sessions, along with opportunities and potential pathways forward. The findings presented here represent a synthesis of participant input and are intended to inform, not advocate for, subsequent policy recommendations. Illustrative project examples and additional policy and implementation context referenced throughout this report are compiled in Appendix A and Appendix B.

The considerations identified through ARTIC Project listening sessions are broadly consistent with findings from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Unmet Needs Report,[1] which documents significant infrastructure gaps across rural Alaska, including thousands of homes lacking access to in-home piped water and sewer service. The report also highlights the importance of sustained investment, coordinated implementation, and local capacity to advance infrastructure development.

[1] Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. (2021). Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium unmet needs report. https://anthc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ANTHC-Unmet-Needs-Report.pdf

Resilience & Community Leadership: Throughout the listening sessions, communities demonstrated strong local leadership, practical problem-solving, and a forward-looking commitment to strengthening systems. Feedback reflected a desire to ensure that development, when pursued, builds lasting capacity and supports long-term community stability. These signals reinforce the resilience of Alaska Native and rural communities and underscore the importance of designing systems that match that strength.

Partnerships: The ARTIC Project is supported by a group of Key Strategic Partners who provide ongoing guidance on project design, sequencing, and alignment with statewide priorities. These partners include the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association (ANVCA), ANCSA Regional Association (ARA), Alaska Municipal League (AML), and Alaska Tribal Administrators Association (ATAA). Collectively, these organizations represent a broad cross-section of Alaska Native, municipal, and Tribal leadership and help ensure the work and any subsequent recommendations remain grounded in practical implementation considerations.

In addition, an Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group was established to inform and validate listening session findings. This working group is comprised of Alaska Native regional and community leaders from across the State and serves as a mechanism to ensure that listening session outcomes and resulting recommendations accurately reflect and account for on-the-ground conditions, regional differences, and community priorities.

1.2 High-Level Themes

Six themes consistently emerged across listening sessions. Together, they highlight the practical conditions that influence project timelines, costs, coordination, and outcomes in rural Alaska.

Capacity & Navigation Support: Participants highlighted the need for additional capacity and navigation support to help Tribes, ANCs, and state and federal agencies effectively engage with permitting processes, grant applications, and development opportunities. Limited staffing and resources, high personnel turnover at the federal agencies, and competing compliance demands create challenges, particularly for smaller organizations managing multiple priorities with constrained resources.

Environmental Review & Permitting Alignment: Participants identified opportunities to better align environmental review processes, agency coordination, and permitting timelines with Alaska's seasonal construction windows and logistical realities. Improved coordination across federal, state, Tribal, and local entities could help streamline processes, reduce delays, and support more efficient and predictable project delivery.

Workforce Needs as Core Infrastructure: Participants underscored the importance of workforce development strategies that create pathways for local hire and training to ensure the durability of local benefit from projects. Workforce housing was consistently identified as a foundational component of economic readiness necessary to support infrastructure development and long-term community stability, and to accommodate workforce influx. Participants noted that increases in population associated with project development can place additional strain on already limited public safety and emergency response systems, reinforcing the need to plan housing, workforce, and community infrastructure in coordination.

Consultation Standards & Education: Participants emphasized the importance and legal requirement of clear, consistent, and meaningful consultation processes. Opportunities exist to improve predictability, clarify decision-making roles, and ensure adequate time for meaningful and respectful community engagement. Participants also noted that strengthening shared understanding, across both agencies and communities, of consultation requirements, expectations, and processes could improve outcomes.

Transportation & Logistics Recognition: Participants highlighted the importance of recognizing the reality of transportation and logistics and challenges as central to project success in rural Alaska. The movement of both materials and workforce, often dependent on seasonal barge service, air travel, and limited infrastructure, requires careful planning and coordination to support timely and cost-effective project execution.

Safety & Emergency Infrastructure Investment: Participants emphasized the importance of investing in infrastructure and systems that support safety and emergency response in remote communities. Limited access to emergency services, challenging travel conditions, and geographic isolation require proactive planning and investment to ensure safe project implementation and community well-being. This need is expected to become increasingly important as development activity expands across Alaska, underscoring the importance of strengthening safety infrastructure and emergency response capacity in parallel with new projects.

1.3 Implications for Project Delivery in Alaska

The current federal policy environment presents both opportunities and challenges for rural Alaska. Increased focus on expediting energy and resource development projects may bring investment and economic activity. At the same time, accelerated timelines heighten the importance of ensuring that projects are well-coordinated, aligned with community realities and values, and supported by the infrastructure and capacity needed for successful implementation. These findings underscore the conditions that will determine whether projects can move forward effectively in rural Alaska. Without that alignment, participants noted a risk that projects may move forward without delivering intended benefits to the communities most directly affected.

2. Listening Sessions Overview

2.1 Participants

The ARTIC Project listening sessions engaged a broad cross-section of stakeholders invested in rural Alaska's future. Participants represented federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) regional and village corporations, regional nonprofit service providers, Tribal consortia, local borough and city government representatives, and other interested parties.

2.2 Geographic & Regional Breadth

Between October 2025 and January 2026, AFN conducted eleven statewide and regional listening sessions:

Date	Session	Scope
October 16, 2025	AFN Convention	Statewide
November 13, 2025	Resource Development Council Conference	Statewide
November 20, 2025	National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Annual Conference (Seattle)	Statewide
December 1, 2025	Aleutian Region Listening Session	Regional
December 2, 2025	Southeast Region Listening Session	Regional
December 4, 2025	Kodiak Region Listening Session	Regional
December 8, 2025	Alaska Municipal League Conference	Statewide
December 9, 2025	ATAA Virtual Session	Statewide
December 12, 2025	Bristol Bay Region Listening Session	Regional
December 17, 2025	Bering Strait Region Listening Session	Regional
January 16, 2026	Interior Region Listening Session	Regional

Input also came through written comments and comment cards submitted by Alaska Native and community leaders from various regions and communities across the state.

2.3 How Input Was Gathered

Each listening session followed a structured format using five guiding questions designed to elicit input on: (1) opportunities for community benefit from energy or resource development; (2) challenges in engaging with agencies and industry; (3) approaches that are working in practice and examples of successful partnerships; (4) regulatory and policy recommendations; and (5) primary barriers to progress. Sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted in-person, virtually, or in hybrid format. Participants could also submit written comments and comment cards through December 31, 2025. All input was synthesized thematically to identify patterns across sessions. Project-specific examples shared by participants are catalogued in Appendix A, and additional context for the policy and implementation considerations referenced in this report is provided in Appendix B.

3. Conditions Impacting Project Delivery in Rural Alaska

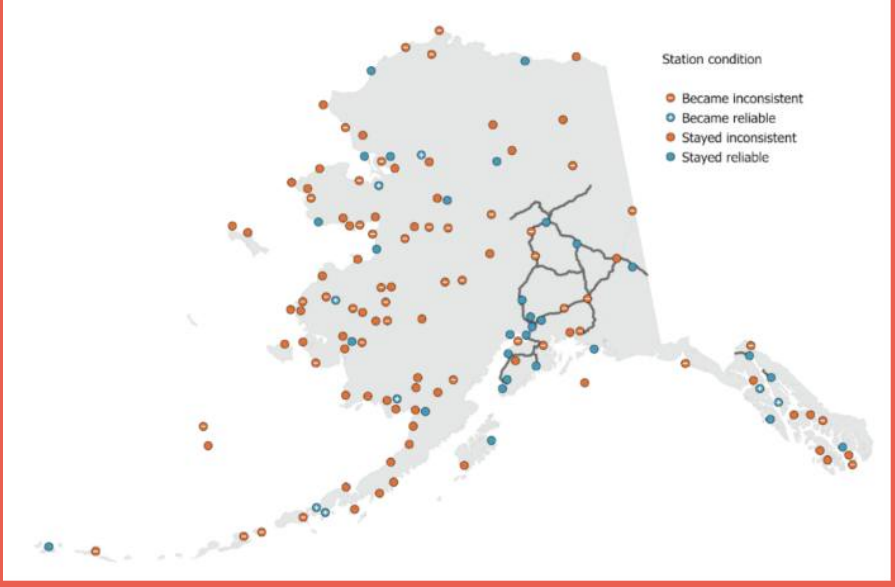
3.1 Foundational Infrastructure as a Precondition to Participation

Participants across all sessions broadly identified inadequate infrastructure as the most fundamental obstacle to economic development in rural Alaska and a key determinant of whether a community is adequately positioned to realize the benefits of development. Specific community examples illustrating these infrastructure conditions are included in Appendix A.

***Supply Chain & Transportation**: Communities* emphasized the critical need for improved roads, airports, ports, ferry services, and the supporting systems associated with transportation. Transportation and logistics inefficiencies substantially increase project costs, especially for communities off the road system. Many villages lack year-round access to regional air transport hubs, with airfare costs reaching thousands of dollars for routine travel, including for health care. Participants noted that marine-transportation dependent communities are often excluded from key Tribal and other transportation funding because existing frameworks do not account for marine-based systems. Participants noted that supply chain and transportation constraints must be addressed to make development economically viable in rural Alaska.

Limited weather and aviation data availability further illustrate the need for transportation-related infrastructure improvements. A 2023 Alaska weather station data availability assessment conducted by University of Alaska Fairbanks found that Alaska had 74 consistently reporting weather stations in 2013, but only 43 in 2023.[2] In off-road areas, the number of stations providing consistent data declined from 50 to 19 since 2015—a 62 percent decline.[3] Reduced data availability increases risks to aviation, subsistence travel, and community safety, while also affecting supply chain reliability and project costs when flights and boats cannot reliably reach communities.

[2] Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Preparedness, International Arctic Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks. (2023). Alaska weather station data availability. https://uaf-accap.org/projects/alaska-weather-station-data-availability/
[3] Ibid.



Energy: High energy costs were cited as a major limiting factor for development. Many rural communities depend on expensive diesel fuel transported long distances. Participants expressed strong interest in renewable energy alternatives, including hydroelectric, geothermal, solar, and wind power—but noted significant constraints to implementation. The Department of Energy Tribal Energy Loan Program was cited as difficult to access, with only one closed loan guarantee since 2018 despite significant allocated funding.

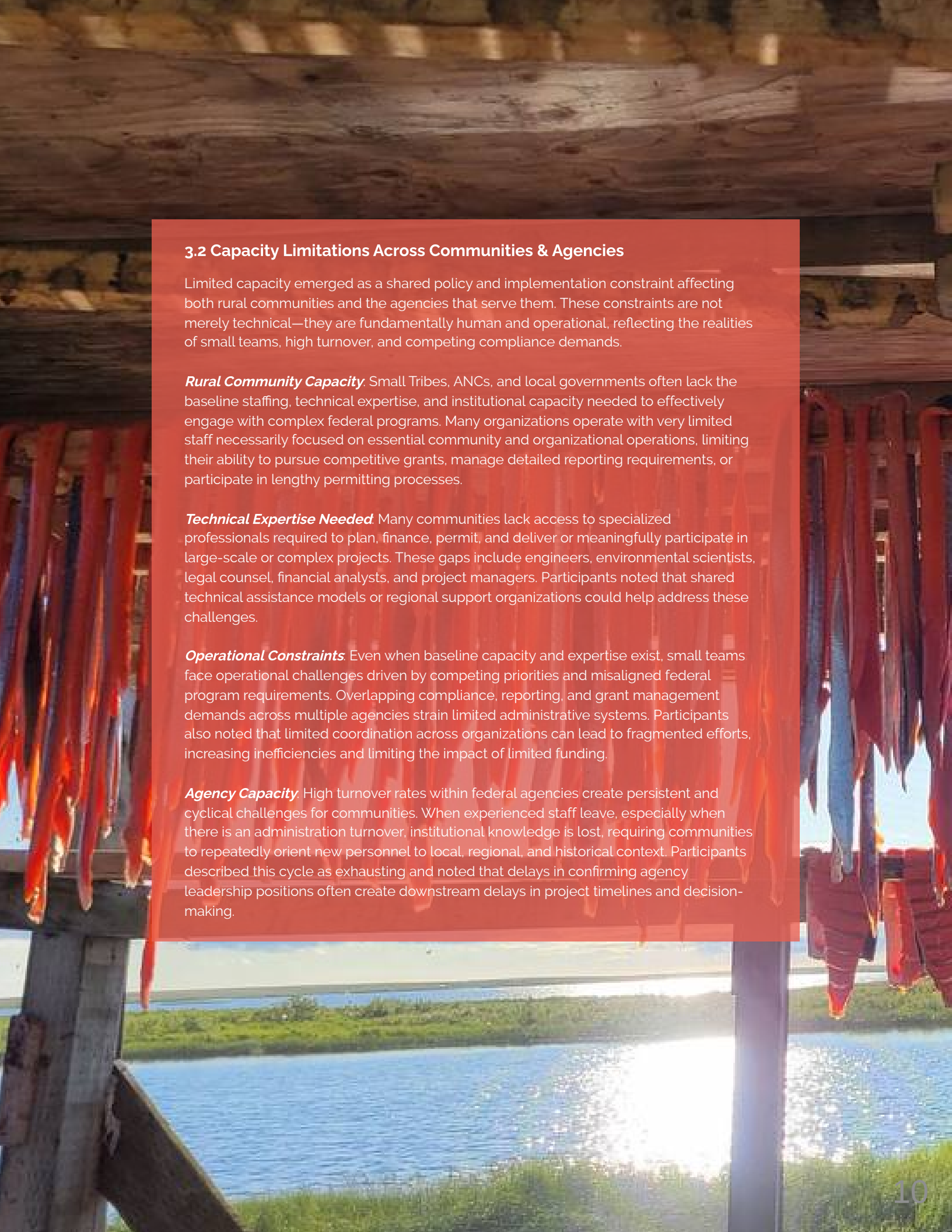
Broadband: Reliable internet connectivity remains inadequate in many rural areas, severely limiting participation in virtual meetings, access to online grant portals, and the ability to conduct remote business operations.

Workforce Housing: The shortage of safe, affordable housing emerged as a critical constraint on workforce availability and community wellbeing. Communities cannot attract workers—including essential personnel such as law enforcement and healthcare providers—without adequate housing. Workforce housing is directly tied to economic readiness and project delivery and must be addressed as necessary pre-development infrastructure rather than absorbed into broader housing initiatives.

Infrastructure: Basic utility infrastructure remains inadequate in many villages, with some communities lacking reliable access to even clean water. Contaminated lands conveyed to Native corporations through ANCSA continue to affect water supplies and land use in some areas. Climate-impacted communities face additional challenges related to permafrost degradation and the need for village relocation planning tools.

Public Safety & Emergency Response: Communities underscored the need to upgrade public safety and emergency response infrastructure to support both current conditions and anticipated workforce growth. Participants noted that an influx of workers during project development can strain already limited public safety systems, including law enforcement, emergency medical services, and search and rescue capacity. Participants emphasized that this capacity must be planned and scaled in parallel with development activity to ensure community safety.

Training & Development: Participants consistently called for expanded training programs to prepare Alaska Native and rural workers for jobs in energy, construction, and resource development, as well as other high-demand fields that support communities (e.g., healthcare, education, public safety, and community infrastructure operations). Workforce development must begin well in advance of project timelines to ensure local residents are qualified when positions become available. Regional trade schools were identified as important resources that require sustained funding and partnerships with industry and communities to effectively prepare the local workforce.



3.2 Capacity Limitations Across Communities & Agencies

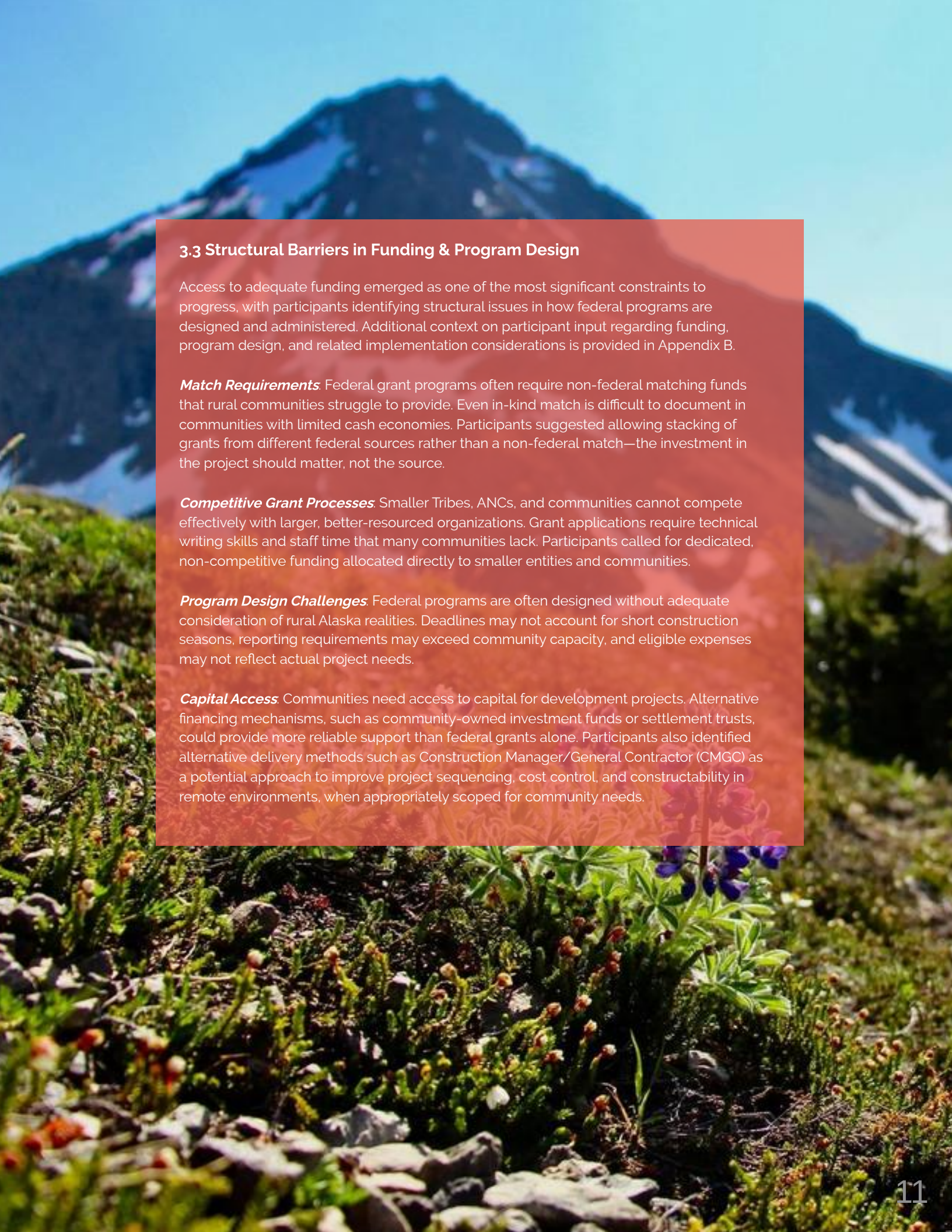
Limited capacity emerged as a shared policy and implementation constraint affecting both rural communities and the agencies that serve them. These constraints are not merely technical—they are fundamentally human and operational, reflecting the realities of small teams, high turnover, and competing compliance demands.

Rural Community Capacity: Small Tribes, ANCs, and local governments often lack the baseline staffing, technical expertise, and institutional capacity needed to effectively engage with complex federal programs. Many organizations operate with very limited staff necessarily focused on essential community and organizational operations, limiting their ability to pursue competitive grants, manage detailed reporting requirements, or participate in lengthy permitting processes.

Technical Expertise Needed: Many communities lack access to specialized professionals required to plan, finance, permit, and deliver or meaningfully participate in large-scale or complex projects. These gaps include engineers, environmental scientists, legal counsel, financial analysts, and project managers. Participants noted that shared technical assistance models or regional support organizations could help address these challenges.

Operational Constraints: Even when baseline capacity and expertise exist, small teams face operational challenges driven by competing priorities and misaligned federal program requirements. Overlapping compliance, reporting, and grant management demands across multiple agencies strain limited administrative systems. Participants also noted that limited coordination across organizations can lead to fragmented efforts, increasing inefficiencies and limiting the impact of limited funding.

Agency Capacity: High turnover rates within federal agencies create persistent and cyclical challenges for communities. When experienced staff leave, especially when there is an administration turnover, institutional knowledge is lost, requiring communities to repeatedly orient new personnel to local, regional, and historical context. Participants described this cycle as exhausting and noted that delays in confirming agency leadership positions often create downstream delays in project timelines and decision-making.



3.3 Structural Barriers in Funding & Program Design

Access to adequate funding emerged as one of the most significant constraints to progress, with participants identifying structural issues in how federal programs are designed and administered. Additional context on participant input regarding funding, program design, and related implementation considerations is provided in Appendix B.

Match Requirements: Federal grant programs often require non-federal matching funds that rural communities struggle to provide. Even in-kind match is difficult to document in communities with limited cash economies. Participants suggested allowing stacking of grants from different federal sources rather than a non-federal match—the investment in the project should matter, not the source.

Competitive Grant Processes: Smaller Tribes, ANCs, and communities cannot compete effectively with larger, better-resourced organizations. Grant applications require technical writing skills and staff time that many communities lack. Participants called for dedicated, non-competitive funding allocated directly to smaller entities and communities.

Program Design Challenges: Federal programs are often designed without adequate consideration of rural Alaska realities. Deadlines may not account for short construction seasons, reporting requirements may exceed community capacity, and eligible expenses may not reflect actual project needs.

Capital Access: Communities need access to capital for development projects. Alternative financing mechanisms, such as community-owned investment funds or settlement trusts, could provide more reliable support than federal grants alone. Participants also identified alternative delivery methods such as Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) as a potential approach to improve project sequencing, cost control, and constructability in remote environments, when appropriately scoped for community needs.

3.4 Permitting & Regulatory Misalignment with Alaska Conditions

Regulatory and permitting challenges were raised in every session, with participants describing processes poorly suited to Alaska's geography, climate, and governance structures.

Environmental Review Timelines: Environmental Impact Statements and Environmental Assessments were described as lengthy and cumbersome, particularly for small-scale community infrastructure projects. Participants called for greater use of categorical exclusions or other streamlined review processes for essential rural infrastructure, such as emergency response infrastructure and community relocations.

Construction Season Constraints: Complex, multi-agency permitting timelines often do not account for Alaska's short construction season, particularly in rural communities off the road system. Logistical challenges related to transporting materials, equipment, and supplies further compress project timelines, increasing the risk that even relatively short permitting delays can push projects back by an entire construction season. Participants noted that supply chain and transportation constraints must be addressed to make development economically viable in rural Alaska.

Jurisdictional Complexity: Overlapping federal, state, and local jurisdictions create confusion and delays. Inconsistent regulatory requirements across communities and projects further complicate planning and execution.

Agency Coordination Gaps: Multiple agencies often work on related issues without effective coordination. Communities must engage separately with numerous agencies, each with different requirements, timelines, and points of contact. Participants noted that interagency working groups that once facilitated collaboration have become less active or ineffective.

Sarah Lukin, ARTIC Project Lead, and Ben Mallott, President of the Alaska Federation of Natives, at the Bristol Bay listening session.

3.5 Consultation Processes & Federal Agency Engagement

Despite the fact that meaningful consultation with Tribes and ANCs is required by law, challenges in Tribal and ANC consultation emerged as one of the most consistently voiced concerns. Participants emphasized that the primary issues are not a lack of engagement by Tribes, ANCs, or Tribal Consortia, but agency timelines, staff turnover, and unclear decision-making authority.

Compressed Timelines: Consultation requests frequently arrive with minimal notice and compressed timelines that do not account for subsistence seasons, limited travel options, or the need for internal community deliberation. Participants reported some consultation timelines as short as 14 days, which may not allow adequate time for community deliberation. Participants emphasized the importance of scheduling consultation at times that do not conflict with vital subsistence activities and cultural obligations, allowing Tribal, ANC, and Tribal Consortia representatives to be present and meaningfully engaged.

Lack of Predictability & Follow-Through: ANC and Tribal input is not always clearly reflected in final agency decisions, leading consultation to be experienced as procedural rather than substantive. Greater predictability in when and how consultation will occur, along with clear follow-through on how input is considered, would advance meaningful consultation.

Staff Turnover & Knowledge Gaps: Federal agency personnel often lack necessary familiarity with Alaska Native governance structures and rural Alaska communities. High turnover requires communities and organizations to repeatedly orient new staff, and concerns shared with senior officials do not always reach project teams. Participants noted that this contributes to mistrust in the consultation process and misalignment between agency intent and implementation. Participants emphasized the importance of increasing Alaska Native representation within agency roles.

Unclear Decision-Making Authority: Tribes and ANCs frequently do not know who holds agency decision-making authority or how their input will be weighed. While agency staff often demonstrate good intent and a willingness to engage, the decision-making process remains unclear to consultation participants.

Administration Changes: Changes in federal administration often shift priorities, resulting in consultation processes and policy approaches being revisited or reset. Participants emphasized the importance of durable consultation frameworks, clear documentation, and institutional continuity to ensure progress and commitments are maintained across administrations.

4. Interconnected Constraints & Tradeoffs

4.1 How Constraints Interact

Participants consistently described the challenges identified in this report not as isolated issues, but as interconnected constraints that compound one another. Infrastructure limitations, capacity gaps, permitting complexity, and funding barriers interact in ways that can delay or prevent project implementation.

For example, limited local capacity can restrict a community's ability to navigate complex permitting processes. Permitting delays, in turn, can cause projects to miss narrow construction windows, increasing costs and creating additional strain on already limited infrastructure and workforce availability. Similarly, infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate transportation systems or housing, can constrain workforce development efforts, even when training programs or funding are available.

This interdependence highlights the importance of coordinated approaches that address multiple constraints simultaneously, rather than attempting to resolve individual challenges in isolation.

4.2 Tradeoffs Communities Must Navigate

Participants also described a series of tradeoffs that communities must weigh and navigate when considering development opportunities:

- ***Speed versus Thoroughness***: While there is interest in more efficient permitting, participants emphasized that efficiency must be balanced with meaningful consultation and environmental review.
- ***Development versus Subsistence***: Economic development opportunities can conflict with subsistence practices and cultural values. Some projects may face united community opposition regardless of guardrails applied or potential benefits.
- ***Regional versus Community Interests***: Actions that benefit one community may burden another. A "one size fits all" approach is not effective in Alaska. Unified regional positions require reconciling diverse local perspectives. Communities with aligned positions and priorities were often more successful in advancing their collective interests.

These tradeoffs underscore that there is no single approach that will work across all regions or projects.

4.3 Conditions that Influence Outcomes

Across sessions, participants emphasized that outcomes are shaped less by individual policies or programs and more by how well key conditions are aligned. These include infrastructure readiness, local capacity, coordinated permitting processes, and meaningful consultation.

Where these elements are aligned, participants noted that projects are more likely to proceed efficiently and deliver tangible community benefits. Where they are not, even well-funded or well-intentioned efforts may face delays, increased costs, or limited local impact.

This reinforces the importance of designing policies and programs that reflect the full set of conditions required for successful implementation in rural Alaska.

5. Opportunities to Strengthen Readiness & Alignment

5.1 Approaches Working in Practice

Participants offered real-world examples of effective collaboration that could serve as models for future engagement. Additional examples of partnerships and agency practices cited by participants are described in Appendix A and Appendix B.

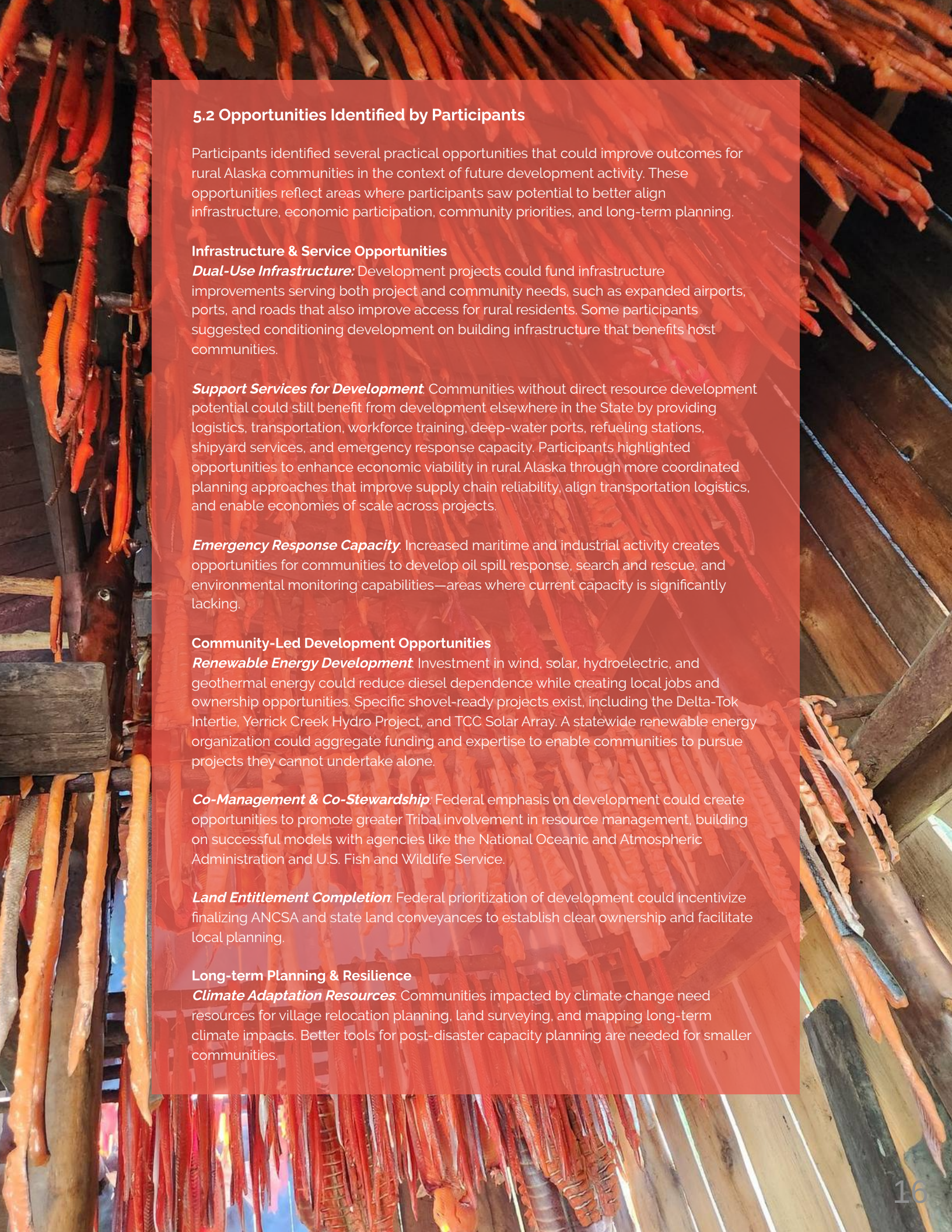
Trilateral Partnerships: Coordination mechanisms among village corporations, Tribes, and municipal governments reduce inefficiencies, improve outcomes for communities, and allow communities to speak with a unified voice. Quarterly meetings among regional partners help achieve these goals.

Public-Private Partnerships: Public-Private partnerships can overcome constraints that no single entity could address alone. Successful workforce housing projects were identified as examples of public-private partnerships that combined federal funding, local government land contributions, Tribal employee support, regional corporation resources, and legal assistance to achieve a shared goal.

Agency Engagement Models: Positive experiences were noted with agencies that assign dedicated liaisons who listen, record, and act on community, Tribal, and Alaska Native input. Regular joint meetings on specific issues like contaminated lands remediation were cited as helpful models. Local people are the experts on their communities—successful engagement recognizes this.

Community Benefit Agreements: Participants recommended legally binding agreements modeled on successful approaches in Greenland and Canada that ensure local hire, contracts with local businesses, and revenue flowing to affected communities.

Healthcare Model: The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium was cited as a successful model demonstrating how centralized capacity can serve multiple communities effectively—a model that could be replicated for infrastructure and energy development.



5.2 Opportunities Identified by Participants

Participants identified several practical opportunities that could improve outcomes for rural Alaska communities in the context of future development activity. These opportunities reflect areas where participants saw potential to better align infrastructure, economic participation, community priorities, and long-term planning.

Infrastructure & Service Opportunities

Dual-Use Infrastructure: Development projects could fund infrastructure improvements serving both project and community needs, such as expanded airports, ports, and roads that also improve access for rural residents. Some participants suggested conditioning development on building infrastructure that benefits host communities.

Support Services for Development: Communities without direct resource development potential could still benefit from development elsewhere in the State by providing logistics, transportation, workforce training, deep-water ports, refueling stations, shipyard services, and emergency response capacity. Participants highlighted opportunities to enhance economic viability in rural Alaska through more coordinated planning approaches that improve supply chain reliability, align transportation logistics, and enable economies of scale across projects.

Emergency Response Capacity: Increased maritime and industrial activity creates opportunities for communities to develop oil spill response, search and rescue, and environmental monitoring capabilities—areas where current capacity is significantly lacking.

Community-Led Development Opportunities

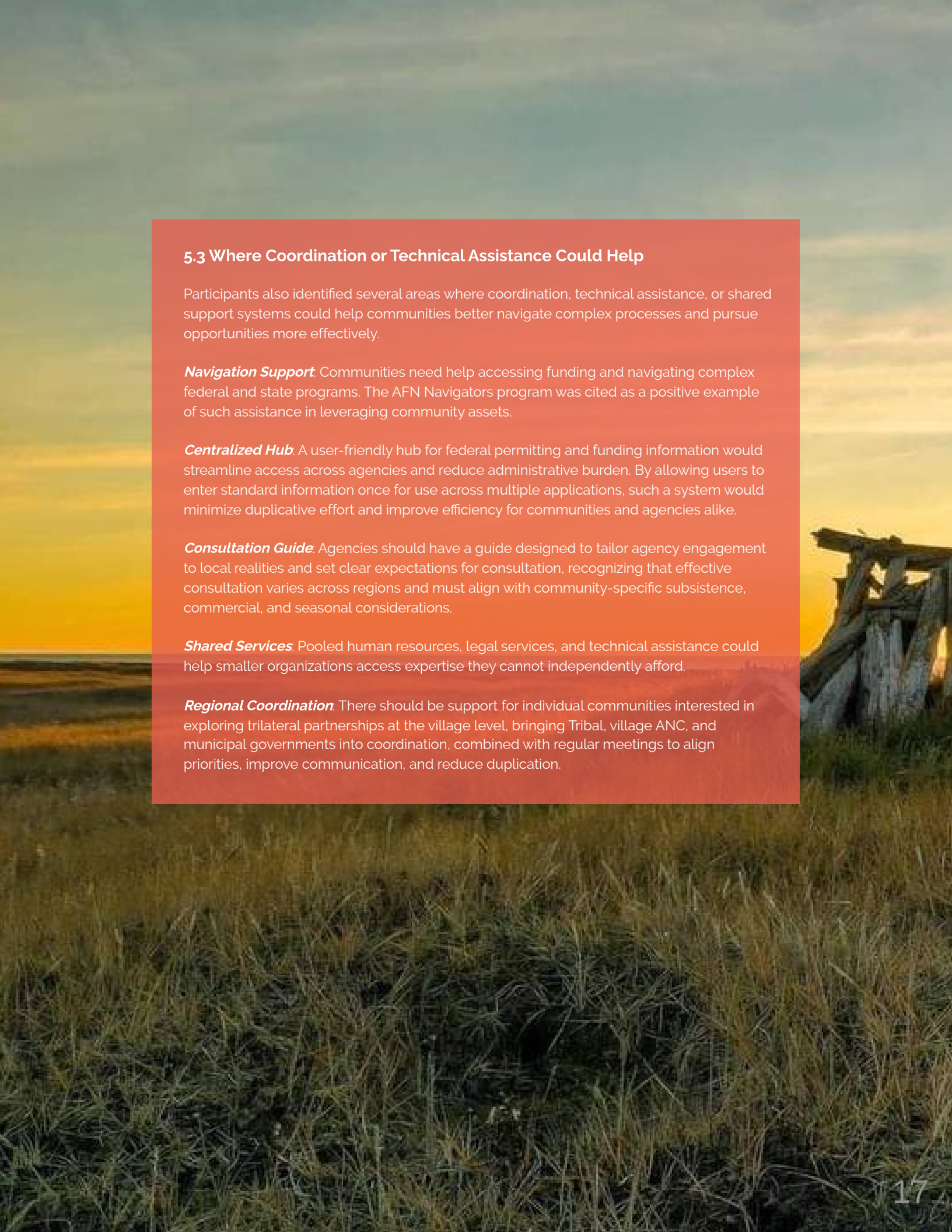
Renewable Energy Development: Investment in wind, solar, hydroelectric, and geothermal energy could reduce diesel dependence while creating local jobs and ownership opportunities. Specific shovel-ready projects exist, including the Delta-Tok Intertie, Yerrick Creek Hydro Project, and TCC Solar Array. A statewide renewable energy organization could aggregate funding and expertise to enable communities to pursue projects they cannot undertake alone.

Co-Management & Co-Stewardship: Federal emphasis on development could create opportunities to promote greater Tribal involvement in resource management, building on successful models with agencies like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Land Entitlement Completion: Federal prioritization of development could incentivize finalizing ANCSA and state land conveyances to establish clear ownership and facilitate local planning.

Long-term Planning & Resilience

Climate Adaptation Resources: Communities impacted by climate change need resources for village relocation planning, land surveying, and mapping long-term climate impacts. Better tools for post-disaster capacity planning are needed for smaller communities.



5.3 Where Coordination or Technical Assistance Could Help

Participants also identified several areas where coordination, technical assistance, or shared support systems could help communities better navigate complex processes and pursue opportunities more effectively.

Navigation Support: Communities need help accessing funding and navigating complex federal and state programs. The AFN Navigators program was cited as a positive example of such assistance in leveraging community assets.

Centralized Hub: A user-friendly hub for federal permitting and funding information would streamline access across agencies and reduce administrative burden. By allowing users to enter standard information once for use across multiple applications, such a system would minimize duplicative effort and improve efficiency for communities and agencies alike.

Consultation Guide: Agencies should have a guide designed to tailor agency engagement to local realities and set clear expectations for consultation, recognizing that effective consultation varies across regions and must align with community-specific subsistence, commercial, and seasonal considerations.

Shared Services: Pooled human resources, legal services, and technical assistance could help smaller organizations access expertise they cannot independently afford.

Regional Coordination: There should be support for individual communities interested in exploring trilateral partnerships at the village level, bringing Tribal, village ANC, and municipal governments into coordination, combined with regular meetings to align priorities, improve communication, and reduce duplication.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Value of Listening-Based Engagement

The ARTIC Project listening sessions demonstrate the importance of creating structured opportunities for Alaska Native and rural community voices to shape policy discussions. Participants brought deep place-based knowledge about their communities, regions, and the practical realities of living and working in rural Alaska. This perspective is essential to developing policies and programs that are responsive to on-the-ground conditions.

The sessions also revealed the value of convening diverse stakeholders to identify areas of shared understanding. While differences exist across communities and organizations, the listening process surfaced consistent themes that can inform more coordinated and effective approaches moving forward.

6.2 The Importance of Coordination & Follow-Through

Participants made clear that the value of this engagement depends on what happens next. Rural Alaska communities have extensive experience with planning processes, studies, and consultations that do not result in tangible outcomes. While the current federal policy environment introduces new considerations and opportunities for rural Alaska and Native communities, agencies, and project proponents, participants emphasized that outcomes will depend on how well development activity—where it occurs—is aligned with community priorities, infrastructure readiness, and local capacity.

The findings in this report provide a foundation for the policy recommendations, resource toolkit, and working group that are subsequent deliverables of the next phase of the ARTIC Project. These findings reflect the conditions identified through listening sessions that shape whether projects can be implemented effectively and whether intended benefits are realized at the community level. These insights are intended to inform subsequent policy considerations, program design, and coordination efforts. They also offer guidance for federal and state agencies seeking to improve their engagement and for industry partners looking to build constructive relationships with the communities in which they operate.

The listening sessions underscored the resilience and community leadership present across rural Alaska. Communities bring established experience and a clear understanding of local priorities. Future progress will depend on how well systems, programs, and partnerships are designed to align with and support that foundation.
In sum, the ARTIC Project will ultimately be judged by whether it contributes to measurable improvements in how agencies engage with Alaska Native and rural communities, how programs are designed and delivered, and how development benefits are realized at the community level.

Sharon Hildebrand, Chief, Tanana Chiefs Conference, speaking at the listening session in Seattle

Acknowledgments

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) extends its appreciation to the many individuals and organizations who contributed their time, insight, and expertise to the ARTIC Project.

We are especially grateful to the Key Strategic Partners—Alaska Native Village Corporation Association (ANVCA), Alaska Municipal League (AML), Alaska Tribal Administrators Association (ATAA), and ANCSA Regional Association (ARA)—for their guidance, collaboration, and ongoing engagement throughout the project. Their partnership and thoughtful input strengthened the analysis and helped ensure the findings reflect real-world conditions and priorities across Alaska. AFN was honored to work alongside the leaders of these organizations.

We also extend our appreciation to the Denali Commission for its vision, guidance, and financial support of the ARTIC Project. As the federal government's primary partner in advancing critical infrastructure in rural Alaska, the Denali Commission plays a vital role in strengthening essential services, supporting community development, and improving quality of life across the state. Their leadership and sustained investment have been instrumental in enabling this work.

We also extend our sincere thanks to the members of the Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group, whose perspectives and feedback helped ensure that project findings reflect the realities, priorities, and experiences of communities across Alaska.

Finally, we acknowledge the many Alaska Native, Tribal, municipal, and community leaders who thoughtfully participated in listening sessions and shared their experiences and recommendations. Their contributions are foundational to this work.

Sarah Lukin, ARTIC Project Lead, presenting at the Seattle listening session.

ARTIC Project Team

This report was developed by AFN with support from Lukin Advisory Group, LLC. Sarah Lukin served as ARTIC project lead and was responsible for facilitation of all listening sessions, synthesis of findings, and preparation of this report.

Legal support was provided by Van Ness Feldman LLP. Attorneys Melinda Meade Meyers, Jaeleen Kookesh, and Lucas Agnew contributed to listening sessions, analytical input, and review of the report, with Melinda Meade Meyers serving as a contributor and editor.

AFN also recognizes the leadership of President Benjamin Mallott, who participated in listening sessions to engage directly with Alaska Native and rural community leaders. Nikki Stoops, Nicole Espe, and Autumn Cantu provided essential support for listening sessions, coordination, and communications, and report production, including Nikki's leadership on the final design and layout of the report for publication.

Alaska Municipal League listening session.

Appendix A: Illustrative Project Examples from ARTIC Project Listening Sessions

Purpose

This appendix compiles illustrative project examples shared by participants during 11 statewide and regional ARTIC project listening sessions held Oct. 2025 – Jan. 2026. The examples are grouped by topic to help readers unfamiliar with the project quickly understand the range of infrastructure, workforce, and community development efforts discussed, including projects that are shovel-ready, in planning, or underway, as well as projects that are stalled or discontinued because of process or financing barriers.

Energy Infrastructure

Delta to Tok Intertie Project
$70 million project awarded to Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).
Supported by Senator Murkowski and the Alaska congressional delegation.
Described as important to regional energy stability and future renewable energy integration in the region.
Status: Cited as a priority project needing continued support to reach completion.

Yerrick Creek Hydro Project
Project would be enabled by the Delta–Tok Intertie backbone.
Much of the proposed site is located on Tanacross, Inc. (TXI) lands.
A prior Environmental Impact Statement was completed by Alaska Power & Telephone in the mid-2010s.
Status: Aspirational/planning stage and dependent on completion of the Intertie.

TCC Solar Array at Old Tok Airstrip
1.5 MW solar array planned on TXI land.
Land lease executed between TXI and TCC.
Raised as an example of Native-led clean energy development with site control already in place.
Status: Shovel-ready.

Interior Energy Project / Gas Pipeline
Public-private partnership intended to bring natural gas heat and power generation to Interior Alaska.
Cited as priority infrastructure in the TCC Strategic Plan.
Participants noted interest in ensuring offshoot or distribution points so surrounding villages could also benefit from lower-cost natural gas or propane, rather than seeing benefits concentrated elsewhere.
Status: In planning; participants emphasized the importance of guaranteed local benefit.

Kotzebue Renewable Energy Portfolio
Combination of wind generation, solar installations, and battery storage capacity.
Tribal Wind grant partnership with Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) reportedly secured $20 million in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Change funding.
Community and Tribal ownership model was highlighted as helping keep project benefits local.
Status: Ongoing and cited as a model with potential for regional replication.

Atka Hydrogen Energy System
Community currently has a hydro-electric system with diesel backup.
Project team is working toward stored hydrogen energy capacity to replace the diesel backup component.
Status: In development with partners.

Ounalashka Geothermal Project
Project pursued a tribal energy loan through DOE for years.
Participants said the project was discontinued after encountering hurdles, DOE extended timelines and process requirements for financing.
Status: Discontinued and cited as an example of barriers within existing federal programs and financing pathways.

Appendix A (Continued)

Akutan Geothermal Feasibility Study
- Feasibility study completed for geothermal development.
- Status: Study complete; project status beyond feasibility stage was not clear from the listening-session materials.

Rural Village Solar/Wind Projects
- One village reported working on solar for three to four years.
- Project was originally part of Solar for All through ANTHC, but participants said federal funding was subsequently redirected.
- The community reportedly pivoted to private funding through the Indigenous Power and Light Fund and an Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA) infrastructure grant.
- Status: Ongoing but challenged; used to illustrate the importance of funding certainty.

Housing & Community Infrastructure

Kodiak Workforce Housing Project
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-supported workforce housing project.
- Participants described a robust public-private partnership: the City of Kodiak offered land at a reduced rate; a local Tribe donated a full-time employee; an ANCSA regional corporation contributed resources; and legal support was provided at no cost.
- Used as a concrete example of how multiple institutions can combine different assets to move a project forward.
- Status: in progress; cited as an effective partnership model for overcoming barriers.

Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHR) Renewable Energy Housing
- Participants described multiple housing units—estimated at roughly 12 to 24—running on renewable energy.
- Project was discussed in the context of potential elder housing.
- Status: Existing or potential model referenced for community housing applications.

Valdez Fishery Infrastructure
- Participants noted that the local salmon run is essential to the economy.
- Associated fishery-related infrastructure reportedly requires repairs and is expensive to maintain.
- Status: Important economic infrastructure facing ongoing maintenance and funding challenges.

Shishmaref Emergency Infrastructure
- Community reportedly lacks an emergency shelter.
- Participants also noted there is no bridge to the mainland for severe emergencies.
- Status: Critical infrastructure gap; funding was cited as a major barrier.

Kivalina Community Relocation
- Participants referenced ongoing managed retreat and community relocation efforts.
- A key question raised was whether relocating communities must complete a full Environmental Impact Statement when rebuilding critical infrastructure elsewhere.
- Status: Ongoing; discussed in connection with environmental review streamlining.

Appendix A (Continued)

Weather Station Data Decline

- Participants reported that off-road and National Weather Service weather station data availability has declined sharply since 2015.[1]
- The decline was described as affecting air support for rural communities, including LifeMed flights and Medevac operations.
- Status: Ongoing public-safety and transportation-support gap.

Workforce Development

- Bethel Regional Trade School
- Regional trade school model cited as a promising workforce development approach.
- Participants discussed the model as one that could potentially be replicated elsewhere.
- Status: Cited as a model; participants suggested continued support for regional trade schools.

Interior Business Accelerator

- Participants referenced a Small Business Development Center partnership supporting communities through a business accelerator model.
- The training was described as culturally appropriate for entrepreneurs.
- The example was discussed as helpful for workforce and business development even in a difficult operating environment with high business failure rates.
- Status: Operating.

Aleut Corporation Training Partnerships

- Partnerships with developers were described as providing training and jobs for local community members.
- Raised as an example of linking infrastructure or commercial development with workforce preparation.
- Status: Working well.

[1] Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Preparedness, International Arctic Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks. (2023). Alaska weather station data availability. https://uaf-accap.org/projects/alaska-weather-station-data-availability/

Appendix A (Continued)

Transportation & Supporting Infrastructure

Unalaska / Aleutian Airport Expansion

- Participants described the Aleutians as the only region in Alaska without an adequate regional airport.
- The existing airport was described as a chokepoint for communities and industry; industry reportedly pays roughly $4,000 per person to fly workers into the region.
- Runway expansion would require both lengthening and widening to accommodate larger jet aircraft.
- Participants said the project is not on the State Department of Transportation (DOT) master plan and also faces State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concerns due to the site being a World War II site.
- Status: Major regional development constraint.

Aleutian Port Infrastructure

- Participants noted that Unalaska has about five miles of dock, but existing infrastructure is still insufficient for regional needs.
- A Maritime Administration (MARAD) assessment of existing port infrastructure was identified as a need.
- Comments emphasized the importance of strategic deployment planning across the Bering Sea, including communities such as Gambell and Tununak.
- Status: Needs an integrated regional port and maritime infrastructure approach.

Unalaska Logistics Hub (Ounalashka Corporation)

- Participants described a proposed logistics hub in Unalaska (Dutch Harbor) to reduce shipping costs and improve supply chain efficiency across the Aleutians and Western Alaska.
- The concept leverages Unalaska's ice-free deep-water port, available land, and regional access to support coordinated warehousing, staging, and distribution.
- Estimated 10–20 percent freight cost savings through coordination and scale.
- Participants noted the hub's broader strategic importance, including support for resource development, community infrastructure, and emerging national defense activity in the Aleutians and Arctic.
- Status: Proposed regional logistics initiative with strong economic and strategic potential.

Broadband Microwave Tower Infrastructure

- Participants described broadband microwave tower installations as facing coordination failures between federal agencies.
- It was noted that advancing some projects can require intervention from a U.S. senator.
- Broadband reliability was framed as critical to healthcare and education in villages.
- Status: Delayed by permitting and coordination issues.

Transportation Access Priorities

- Participants identified seasonal ice road construction and maintenance as important for winter village access.
- Additional priorities included improving transportation routes to expedite goods and services and increasing snowmachine trail signage along key routes.
- Status: Identified implementation priorities connected to local access and safety.

Ampy Pay-as-You-Go System Obsolescence

- Participants described pay-as-you-go electricity equipment as obsolete.
- The company associated with the system reportedly shut down years ago and replacement parts are no longer available.
- Because the issue affects continuity of local service delivery, it is included here as part of broader supporting infrastructure reliability concerns.
- Status: Operational risk for communities still relying on the system.

Appendix B: Additional Context for Policy & Implementation Considerations Raised in ARTIC Listening Sessions

Purpose

This appendix provides additional context for many of the shared policy and implementation considerations identified by participants across ARTIC listening sessions described in the summary report on the ARTIC listening sessions, as well as for the project examples in Appendix A. It is intended to help readers identify recurring implementation themes raised by participants across multiple listening-sessions by retaining the context participants provided, what they said was happening, why it mattered, and what kinds of process changes or supports they believed would improve outcomes.

Permitting & Environmental Review

EIS/EA Streamlining for Community Infrastructure

- Participants described Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Assessment (EA) processes as lengthy, often two to four years, and poorly calibrated for smaller, community-scale infrastructure projects.
- Comments suggested exploring categorical exclusions or other streamlined review pathways for essential rural community infrastructure.
- Participants also questioned whether relocating communities should be required to complete full EIS processes when rebuilding critical infrastructure in managed-retreat scenarios.

Tribal Environmental Review Disparity

- There are uneven review timelines across entities undertaking similar types of work.
- One example was that tribal housing environmental reviews can take up to a year, compared with roughly two months for another regional housing authority.
- Participants suggested further examination of why these differences occur and whether timelines can be made more consistent.

Permitting Timeline and Coordination

- Participants repeatedly emphasized that permitting delays can cause communities to miss Alaska's short construction season, described in one draft as roughly 120 days, thereby pushing work back an entire year.
- Broadband, dock, airport, and relocation examples were all discussed in ways that connected project delay to permitting and review sequencing.
- Suggested improvements included establishing clearer agency response timelines once requests are submitted, providing more predictable guidance, and improving federal-state coordination where overlapping jurisdiction causes delay or confusion.
- Establishing a coordinated "permitting hub" would streamline reviews across agencies, reduce duplicative processes, and provide a single point of navigation for communities and project sponsors.

Tribal Consultation

Consultation Timeline Requirements

- Participants reported examples of consultation processes conducted in as little as 14 days.
- The concern expressed was that a 14-day expedited consultation timeline does not account for subsistence seasons, travel limitations, internal deliberation needs, or the time required for Tribes and communities to review technical information.
- Participants said consultation timelines should allow adequate time for community deliberation, and that written information should be shared before meetings so leaders can come prepared.

Meaningful Tribal Consultation and Follow-Through

- Participants described Tribal consultation as too often feeling like a box-checking exercise, with little indication that Tribal, ANC, and Tribal Consortia input affected the final outcome.
- Related comments emphasized the importance of predictability, follow-through, and clear explanation of how community input is incorporated.
- One set of comments suggested that agency consultation should be tailored to local preferences and communication styles rather than following a one-size-fits-all template.
- A shared interagency calendar or dashboard to align consultations by region would improve coordination, and enable Tribes, ANCs, and Tribal Consortia to participate in joint agency consultations for projects with multiple federal partners.

Appendix B (Continued)

Alaska-Specific Agency Training

- Participants linked repeated frustration to agency staff turnover and a lack of understanding of Alaska Native governance structures and local realities.
- Suggested responses included Alaska-specific training for agency personnel involved in consultation and, more broadly, hiring more Alaska Native personnel into agency roles.

Consultation Examples Reflecting Instability

- Participants raised examples of consultation issues not only as procedural issues, but also as trust issues affecting long-term planning and collaboration.
- Participants described several examples illustrating concerns about instability and inconsistency in consultation practice, including a major road-related permitting process that was revisited after an administration change.
- Another example described a sharp decline in consultation notices received by one regional organization, shifting concern from inadequate consultation to reduced consultation altogether.

Funding & Program Design

DOE Tribal Energy Loan Program

- Participants described high upfront costs and long review timelines associated with the Department of Energy (DOE) Tribal Energy Loan Program.
- Only one loan guarantee has reportedly closed since 2018 despite a much larger authorization level (see GAO-25-107441).
- The abandoned Ounalashka geothermal project was used as a concrete example of how financing program design can affect project viability.

Match Requirements and Funding Flexibility

- Participants reported that non-federal match requirements are difficult for many rural communities to meet.
- Examples and suggestions to address this issue included allowing stacking across federal funding sources, waiving or exempting match requirements for small communities, and moving toward more flexible block-funding approaches tailored to different types of local need such as power, water, or housing.

Non-Competitive and Direct Funding Approaches

- One concern raised was that smaller entities often cannot compete effectively with larger organizations in standard competitive processes.
- Participants suggested dedicated, non-competitive funding directly allocated to smaller Tribes, ANCs, and communities in some circumstances, particularly where capacity limitations make standard competitions less realistic.

Grant Portal and Administrative Simplification

- Participants described federal grant portals as clunky, fragmented, and difficult to navigate, with each agency using different systems and information structures.
- This problem is compounded by lack of broadband access for many rural communities throughout the State.
- One example referenced a state capital assistance process taking up to 16 days for data input and processing.
- Suggested improvements included simplified portals and a more centralized, user-friendly resource hub for federal permitting and funding information.

Funding for Planning vs. Construction

- Participants described situations in which grant dollars were available for surveys, studies, or planning but not for actual construction.
- This mismatch was raised as a major frustration because communities may complete studies without having resources to implement the resulting project, and a large gap between planning and construction can leave those planning materials outdated and in need of an update.

Appendix B (Continued)

Access to Capital & Financing

Capital Access Constraints

- In some examples, participants linked delay or abandonment to limited access to affordable, workable financing.
- Comments pointed to high transaction costs, slow review timelines, and financing structures that do not align well with rural Alaska realities or smaller project sponsors.
- These concerns are closely connected to, but not limited to, federal loan programs.

Sovereign Immunity and Participation Barriers

- Participants said some state-linked entities or project structures have required Tribes to waive sovereign immunity to participate in energy projects.
- The issue was described as a dealbreaker for some communities and was discussed as a barrier to Tribal participation in otherwise promising development opportunities.

Historic Capital Flow Concerns

- ·Participants also raised broader concerns that large resource development projects have historically delivered benefits to urban areas without adequately reducing costs or increasing reinvestment in surrounding rural communities.
- These comments were used to explain why communities are scrutinizing current and future financing and benefit structures closely.

Transportation Policy & Project Delivery

Marine-Dependent Community Recognition

- ·Participants said marine-transportation dependent communities are often structurally excluded from crucial funding available for Tribal transportation because existing frameworks do not account for marine-based transportation systems.
- The concern was framed around ferry-system gaps and the difficulty of fitting marine access realities into standard transportation formulas.

Alternative Contracting Approaches

- Participants noted interest in alternative contracting and project delivery models, including Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) approaches.
- The discussion suggested these models may help improve coordination, sequencing, constructability review, and cost control for complex projects in rural environments where logistics and phasing are especially difficult.

Community Benefit & Local Hire

Legally Binding Benefit Agreements

- Participants said Community Benefit Agreements are often not enforceable in practice.
- Suggestions included making Tribal Benefit Agreements and Community Benefit Agreements legally binding, with one example pointing to a Washington State Department of Commerce model.

Local Hire Requirements

- Participants expressed concern that outside workers are often brought in instead of local residents.
- Comments referenced the Trans-Alaska Pipeline era as a point of comparison and suggested that local contracting and hiring clauses, clearer definitions of local hire, and stronger Native-hire preferences may help communities capture more direct benefit from projects.

Approaches That Are Working in Practice

Effective Agency Practices

- Ounalashka Corporation reported it had a positive experience with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) on ANCSA contaminated lands cleanup, including regular joint meetings that helped coordinate action.
- A National Park Service (NPS) partnership in Wrangell was cited as a structured ongoing relationship using a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and regular meetings to discuss jobs and regulations.
- Participants also described substantial EPA support for one Tribe's environmental department as valuable because it built ongoing Tribal capacity rather than funding only a narrow task.

A consultation liaison model within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was cited as a positive example because the liaison asked questions, listened, and reportedly ensured Tribal input was reflected in the final product.

Appendix B (Continued)

Community-Based and Multi-Entity Partnerships

- Participants highlighted a strong partnership among the Tribe, village ANC, and city government in Unalaska, noting that a unified voice makes a difference with state officials and congressional offices.
- The Kodiak workforce housing project was also referenced here as an example of distributed contributions across city, Tribe, ANC, and legal partners.
- Quarterly multi-organization coordination among statewide and regional entities was raised as a model for reducing duplication and supporting shared priorities.

Capacity Support and Technical Assistance Models

- The Native Village of Kotzebue and ANTHC wind partnership was cited as working in part because it gave the community access to a professional team, including project managers, grant writers, and permitting specialists.
- Participants also highlighted the AFN Navigators Program as helpful for communities navigating complex federal and state programs.
- DOE's Arctic Energy Ambassadors Program was described as providing stipends that supported regional energy positions and created connections to technical assistance resources.

Flexible Federal and Intergovernmental Program Models

- Participants cited the 477 Program as a model for Tribal self-governance because of its flexibility.
- The 105(l) lease program was described as a successful example of a reliable funding stream for Tribal facilities.
- Kenaitze Indian Tribe's Title IV-E foster care program was cited as an example of direct federal-Tribal partnership supporting tribal control of service delivery.
- Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) was discussed as a model that can produce two-way benefits: military personnel receive training while communities receive labor, operators, and sometimes medical or veterinary services.

Coordination Mechanisms that Improve Communication

- Regional Advisory Council meetings were described as valuable because federal, state, and Tribal participants sit together and work through actual issues in the same forum.
- Restoration Advisory Board representatives in Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS)/Brownfields contexts were cited as helpful because local representatives can translate technical federal language into terms communities understand.

Implementation Challenges & System Gaps Identified by Participants

Regulatory, Staffing, and Coordination Constraints

- Participants described staffing shortages and vacancies in federal offices as prolonging application and review processes and eroding continuity.
- New agency staff were said to require repeated re-education, adding delay and frustration.
- Participants also referenced situations in which concerns communicated to one set of industry or agency representatives did not carry through to project teams doing the actual work.

Capacity and Administrative Burden

- The Kake trail project example illustrated the scale of burden some communities face: participants said the grant application process required contact with eight federal and state agencies and roughly 42 hours of writing time.
- Participants emphasized that capacity constraints are not merely technical; small teams, staff turnover, and competing compliance demands create real operational pinch points.
- One example also described local government stress severe enough to threaten basic revenue collection and service delivery, which in turn affects matching capacity and project administration.

Program and Community Misalignment

- The Solar for All example illustrated how changes in program direction can force communities to rebuild financing plans after years of work.
- Several examples reflected a broader concern that available programs often do not align with on-the-ground project realities, especially when funding is available for planning but not implementation, or when transportation formulas do not fit marine-dependent communities.

Consistency and Predictability

- Participants said abrupt funding or policy changes reduce confidence in government support and make long-term planning difficult.
- Examples shared included behavioral health funding changes, permits being revisited, and project funding awards being revisited after administration changes, and long project timelines being disrupted by shifting priorities.
- These comments were often framed less as isolated project problems and more as a broader challenge of institutional predictability.