



2024-2028 Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Education & Workforce Development Summary: Work Session Draft – February 2024

Where We Are Today	What data indicators can we monitor to track progress? Where do we want to be in 5 years?	Where We Aim to Be in 2028
11.2% (2022)	Unemployment Rate: Average unemployment rate of both YK census areas (Bethel Census Area and Kusilvak Census Area). ¹	4.6% ¹ (statewide unemployment rate)
Need to identify	YK Resident Employment Rate: Percent of jobs filled by regional residents.	Need to identify
Need to identify	Jobs: Number of jobs created or retained among YK region in emerging sector industries.	Need to identify

Other ideas: Per Capita Wages; Labor Force Participation Rate; Placement rates for students graduating from programs

Sources: ¹2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Averages

Education & Workforce Development Objectives (adapted from previous CEDS)

1. Regional residents are prepared to work in emerging economic sectors, including aviation, energy, housing construction and rehabilitation, infrastructure, planning, transportation, and resource development.
2. All youth in YK have access to a quality education.

Education & Workforce Development Strategic Direction: Potential Strategies and Actions

Proposed Strategy A: Collectively develop and implement regional vocational training workforce development plans for crucially needed occupations.

1. Key industries to focus on include:
 - Communications (e.g., broadband technicians) – *see Communications focus area*
 - Energy (e.g., utility operators, renewable energy infrastructure build out and maintenance) – *see Energy focus area*
 - Housing construction/rehabilitation and water-sewer infrastructure installation and maintenance (e.g., skilled trade jobs, localized sawmills for Harvest to Home programming, operators) – *see Housing and Water-Sewer focus area*
 - Aviation (e.g., ground school instructors, pilots)
 - Child care
 - Health care (e.g., community health aides)
 - Planning (e.g., climate adaptation)
 - Public safety (e.g., Village Public Safety Officers)
 - Resource development (biotechnicians, natural resource management, Geographic Information System [GIS])
 - Transportation (e.g., Commercial Driver's License [CDL]-certified drivers, traffic control technicians, surveyors, equipment operators)

Guiding Questions for YK CEDS Work Session Breakouts

1. What strategies or actions are missing?
2. Which strategies and actions are the most important to achieve first and over the next five years?
3. How can we collaborate to make progress?

Other Potential Actions

2. Conduct quarterly meetings between education/workforce development agencies, and the HR departments of major employers.
3. Once communities have improved broadband connectivity, develop and implement a remote workforce development strategy to encourage more village residents to pursue remote work.
4. Partner with Yuut Elitnaurviat or the Kuspuk School District's EXCEL program for high school students to expand construction apprenticeship programs.
5. Increase youth engagement in governance and decision-making on commissions, boards and councils.
6. Increase salaries and wages to be competitive and support local costs of living.
7. Consider and plan for workforce development and training in infrastructure build out grant applications to better coordinate implementation (project schedule, capacity, etc.) of large projects.
8. Conduct finance, business basics, and life management skills education in communities to help residents understand credit, loans, insurance and banking opportunities, starting with youth in junior and senior high schools, and including young and older adults.
9. Create a Facebook group to share job postings or possible work opportunities (e.g., if a construction project is slated).

Other Relevant Resources and Potential Funding Sources

Relevant Resources

- The Unmet Needs of Environmentally Threatened Alaska Native Villages: Assessment and Recommendations. Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. January 2024. [View here.](#)
- Bristol Bay Broadband Implementation Plan for Virtual Jobs Adoption. Bristol Bay Native Corporation and the Denali Commission. December 2023. [View here.](#)
- Alaska EXCEL. <https://alaskaexcel.org/>
- Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program. <https://www.ansep.net/>
- Association of Village Council Presidents. <https://www.avcp.org/>
- Northern Industrial Training (Mat-Su Valley-based). <https://nitalaska.com/>
- The Kuskokwim Corporation. <https://kuskokwim.com/>
- University of Alaska Fairbanks, Kuskokwim Campus. <https://www.uaf.edu/bethel/>
- Yuut Elitnaurviat People's Learning Center. <https://yuut.org/>

Strengths and Opportunities

Internal and external factors that contribute to our success in this focus area

- Organizations and businesses in the region are investing in workforce development through targeted training courses, certification programs, force account hiring, job centers, trade school facilities and more. Key organizations include: The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC), Yuut Elitnaurviat, Mat-Su Valley-based Northern Industrial Training, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), EXCEL Alaska, and more.
- Increased focus to bring vocational trainings directly to communities.
- Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), the University of Alaska Fairbanks Kuskokwim Campus, and regional school districts facilitate advanced or accelerated youth learning and training opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), allied health, and Tribal and community leadership.
- YK schools have high local involvement and control; many schools have cross-cultural education and language revitalization programs.
- Many new or under-construction schools.
- Federal infrastructure funding will bring in additional employment opportunities for jobs in broadband buildout, water-sewer installation, and more.
- Expansion of broadband will increase employment opportunities for rural residents to conduct remote work, and to access online education.
- Some seasonal jobs reduce the available workforce several months out of the year, competitive salaries and wages could retain the full-time workforce.

Weaknesses and Threats

Internal and external factors that are barriers to our success in this focus area

- Limited availability of local jobs, training, and vocational education in many communities.
- Education funding from the State of Alaska has not kept up with inflation, resulting in a lack of resources for school renovations, facility energy costs, curriculum updates, scholarships, Head Start programming, and teacher salaries.
- Short-term infrastructure buildout jobs do not provide long-term career opportunities.
- Lack of reliable internet connectivity and cell service limit opportunities to work from home and participate in distance education and training.
- Teachers are often not from the region, or even from Alaska, and there is high turnover in education roles.
- Lack of affordable childcare prevents many parents from entering the workforce.
- Many high-achieving students migrate out of the region, resulting in a “brain drain” of young and capable individuals leaving the regional workforce.
- Many of the region’s highest paying jobs are filled by people outside the region, including doctors, teachers, administrators, and pilots.
- Local hire and workforce capacity for climate adaptation planning remains low.
- Residents with criminal backgrounds experience barriers to entering the workforce and finding employment.