

YK Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Business Development Working Group

9:30 am – 11:10 am, Friday, April 19, 2024

Meeting recording:

https://agnewbeck.zoom.us/rec/share/0v2YT6mSPB5ZFKFcgctweb3NmhoiwL0GIaNviTFvVSS_icYEXjTaa2vMUKEqYm4H.LYpcD5V85eqP73M6?startTime=1713547921000

Attendees (alphabetized by organization)

Attendee Name	Organization	Email Address
Carole Triem	Alaska Municipal League	carole@akml.org
Diane Atti	Association of Village Council Presidents	datti@avcp.org
Mr. John P. Charlie	Association of Village Council Presidents	jcharlie@avcp.org
Michelle DeWitt	Bethel Community Services Foundation	michelle@bcsfoundation.org
Lorin Bradbury	Bethel United Pentecostal Church / Bethel Chamber of Commerce	
Alba Brice	Calista Corporation	abrice@calistacorp.com
Colleen Laroux	Donlin Gold	claroux@donlingold.com
Sean Glasheen	Nuvista	Stglasheen@nuvistacoop.org
Bonnie Bradbury	REMAX Dynamic Properties / Bethel Chamber of Commerce	bonniejo192@icloud.com
Bob Marquez	Rural CAP	bmarquez@ruralcap.org
Steven Brown	Small Business Administration Alaska	steven.brown@sba.gov
Laura Ellsworth	SouthWest Alaska Art Group	southwestalaskaartsgroup@gmail.com
Erik O'Brien	The Denali Commission	eobrien@denali.gov
Andrea Gusty	The Kuskokwim Corporation	andrea.gusty@kuskokwim.com
Nolan Klouda	University of Alaska Economic Development	nfklouda@uaa.alaska.edu
Deanna Lathan	Yukon Kuskokwim Health Consortium	Deanna_Latham@ykhc.org
Russell Pollock	Yukon Kuskokwim Health Consortium	russell_pollock@ykhc.org
Marybeth Whalen	Yupit Piciryarit Cultural Center	mrwhalen@alaska.edu

Meeting Objectives

- Introduce the Purpose and Process of the YK CEDS
 - Learn more at the [AVCP website](#).
- Reminder of the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Business Development Strategy and Actions
- Share what we've learned based on recent interviews, supplemental research, and a small business survey
- Discuss solutions to the business development needs of the YK region and priority topics for collaboration this spring

Discussion Notes

Reminder of Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (YK CEDS) Purpose

- AVCP is working on a larger, five-year update that is more detailed than the annual updates. This hopefully will reflect the communities' priorities.
- There is a lot of participation across working groups, which has provided a more interdisciplinary approach to this work.

Review and Discuss Past YK CEDS Business Development Recommendations

- The project team shared the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Business Development Strategy and Actions (copied below) and offered a brief recap of where the group left off at the March 2022 Business Development Working Group meeting (see slides for additional details).

STRATEGY 1: Build interest, investment in, and capacity for locally owned, operated, and innovative businesses.

1-A. Continue the Small Business Development “Best in the West” competitions to encourage entrepreneurship in the YK region.

1-B. Develop and robustly distribute how-to manuals or resource guides that detail success stories, resources, and links for where to find information and assistance for a person or organization interested in starting a local business.

- Reflected on the highlights from the February Work Session Business Development breakout.

Small Business/Crafter Survey Results | Spring 2024

- See slides for results, including challenges and needed support. Received 24 responses.
- Nuvista is a TA for the [Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grant](#).
 - Please reach out to [Sean Glasheen](#) if you are interested in a small businesses grant.
- Need space for a crafts gift shop. Could be in villages, in Bethel, or in Anchorage. The gift shop at the Alaska Native Medical Center is one successful example.
- Need job opportunities. There needs to be a pathway to reintroduce formerly incarcerated folks into the job market.
- Diane: favorite part of doing the surveys with the crafters was how they shared their culture in the crafts that they did and looking for ways how we were all connected together as Yupik people. I really enjoyed how they shared they learned their crafts from learning from Elders.
- We focus too much on arts and crafts when we talk about rural economic development. We need to be thinking bigger picture, including higher paying jobs, skilled labor, technical training for full-time jobs in communities.

Potential Solutions to Priority Topics

Expand the “Best in the West” competition.

- The Bethel Community Services Foundation (BCSF) is working to turn over 2023 funds to the SouthWest Alaska Arts Group (SWAAG).
 - Would be more arts-focused; would be smaller award funds due to less fundraising in 2023. Largest category of past awardees have been artists.

- CCSF did extensive outreach to identify a new host organization (BCSF is fiscal sponsor), was unable to find anyone. Longtime host YPCC lost the funding to facilitate the program. Currently on pause for 2024.
- If we want that competition to diversify beyond the arts focus, we would need to find a programmatic home. Otherwise, SWAAG will be a great host since their focus is on the arts.
- UA CED does entrepreneurial training; did much of the training when YPCC hosted. Needs assistance with recruitment, relationships, etc. – cannot operate the whole program.
- Need a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) in the region.
- Need a strategic discussion about what the direction of the competition is in the future.
- SWAAG has a really robust network of current crafters and business owners. They are excited to play this role, but adaptable to whatever strategic direction for the competition is determined.
 - Strategic change to SWAAG, if there are any other ideas, please speak now!
 - Individual Artist awards – could benefit from a small working group to help get off the ground. Would love to see awardees continue one to pursue Individual Artist awards with Rasmuson Foundation.
- May require a working group to get off the ground. Marybeth happy to share resources, application files, etc. Nolan can assist.

Bethel Chamber of Commerce

- There was an effort to digitize their resources and processes, but ended up going dormant.
- They are now starting over again; “will need to be very grassroots.” It’s difficult to get engagement from businesses due to lack of capacity.
- The focus is on Bethel but businesses from around the region are welcome to participate. For example – businesses what updates on what’s happening with major economic development efforts in the region, such as Donlin Gold.
- The Small Business Administration (SBA) is looking to determine how to better support and provide resources to chambers of commerce and increase business participation and growth. They are still mapping it out. Could take the form of monthly/quarterly conversations with Chamber organizers.

Other Small Business Needs and Supports

- The current bypass mail plane situation needs to be addressed.
 - It has turned into a monopoly and is prohibitive for small and mid size business owners. Small and mid-sized businesses are not able to get their goods or supplies reliably. Kalskag can’t get any freight in, because of Ryan (they don’t have an agent). Must charter planes to get supplies – would like to see this group raise awareness about this issue.
 - The subsidies are not working. Systemic barriers to getting supplies and operating businesses.
 - Freight Corridor project is currently stalled. DoT has put the corridor on their list of things to look into.

Other Ideas

- [Business Impact NW](#) is the newest microlender serving Alaska. They offer technical assistance to help business owners become more financially savvy and “bankable.”

Wrap up and Next Steps

- Slides, notes, and the meeting recording will be available on the project website.