

Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Education & Workforce Development

Summary: April 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% of residents are unemployed (2022)	Unemployment Rate: The number of jobless civilians 16 and older who are seeking employment. It does not include retirees or those who choose not to work. Average unemployment rate of both YK census areas (Bethel Census Area and Kusilvak Census Area). ¹	4.6% unemployed¹ <i>(statewide unemployment rate)</i>
Need to identify	YK Resident Employment Rate: Percent of jobs in the region 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

Sources: ¹ [2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Averages](#)

Other Potential Indicators: Per capita wages; Labor force participation rate; graduation rates (Potential source: University of Alaska Fairbanks); placement rates for students graduating from programs; skills gap data; community-specific data. Use data from “Where We Are Today for Percent of Jobs Filled by Regional Residents for 2022” in the [Nonresidents Working in Alaska 2022 report](#) from Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Education & Workforce Development Objectives *(adapted from 2018-2023 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: *Address barriers to training and employment.*

1. Recognize and address the need for childcare in all workforce-related discussions.
2. Fund and develop a regional workforce needs assessment.
3. Provide mental health and wellness support alongside education and training.
4. Standardize culturally appropriate worker benefits; imbed cultural values in the workforce.
5. Increase options for remote training and certifications. Include more technically advanced remote training, like commercial driver's license (CDL) and heavy equipment simulators. Coordinate with training centers and other regional groups to increase access to the internet and computers to allow for more online training opportunities.

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

6. Workforce development plans should consider a diversity of strategies and cover key industries.
 - Communications (e.g., broadband technicians) – see “Connectivity Summary”
 - Energy (e.g., utility operators, renewable energy infrastructure build-out and maintenance) – see “Energy Summary”
 - Housing construction/rehabilitation and water-sewer infrastructure installation and maintenance (e.g., skilled trade jobs, localized sawmills for Harvest to Home programming, operators); *(Potential partner: Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium)* – see “Housing and Water-Sewer Summary”
 - Aviation (e.g., ground school instructors, pilots)
 - Childcare
 - Health care (e.g., community health aides)
 - Planning (e.g., climate adaptation)
 - Public safety (e.g., Village Public Safety Officers)
 - Resource development (e.g., biotechnicians, natural resource management, Geographic Information System [GIS])
 - Transportation (e.g., CDL-certified drivers, traffic control technicians, surveyors, equipment operators)

Other Potential Actions

7. Conduct regular meetings between education/workforce development agencies and representatives from major employers *(potentially through expanded participation with Calista's YK Workforce Development Group)*.
8. Once communities have improved broadband connectivity, develop and implement a remote workforce development strategy to encourage more village residents to pursue remote work.
9. Partner with Yuut Elitnaurviat or the Kuspuk School District's EXCEL program for high school students to expand construction apprenticeship programs.
10. Increase youth engagement in governance and decision-making on commissions, boards, and councils.
11. Increase salaries and wages to be competitive and support local costs of living.
12. Consider and plan for workforce development and training in infrastructure build-out grant applications to better coordinate large projects' implementation (e.g., project schedule, capacity).
13. Conduct finance, business basics, and life management skills education in communities to help residents understand credit, loans, insurance, and banking opportunities. Start with junior and senior high school students, then include younger children and adults.

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.** [View here.](#)
- **Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program.** [View here.](#)
- **Association of Village Council Presidents.** [View here.](#)
- **Northern Industrial Training** (Mat-Su Valley-based). [View here.](#)
- **The Kuskokwim Corporation.** [View here.](#)
- **University of Alaska Fairbanks, Kuskokwim Campus.** [View here.](#)
- **Yuut Elitnaurviat People’s Learning Center.** [View here.](#)

Strengths and Opportunities

Internal and external factors that contribute to our success in this focus area (in alphabetical order)

- Additional employment opportunities in broadband build-out, water-sewer installation, and others due to federal infrastructure funding.
- Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), the University of Alaska Fairbanks Kuskokwim Campus, and regional school districts training opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), allied health, and Tribal and community leadership.
- High local involvement and control at YK schools, and the inclusion of cross-cultural education and language revitalization programs.
- Prioritizing opportunities for local vocational training.
- More regional investment in workforce development from key entities like The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC), Yuut Elitnaurviat, Northern Industrial Training, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), and EXCEL Alaska. Includes targeted training courses, certification programs, force account hiring, job centers, and trade school facilities.
- Growing rural employment opportunities for remote work and online education due to broadband expansion.
- Many new or under-construction schools.

Weaknesses and Threats

Internal and external factors that are barriers to our success in this focus area (in alphabetical order)

- Limited workforce availability for several months out of the year due to seasonal jobs.
- High teacher turnover.
- Highest paying jobs often filled by people outside the region (e.g., doctors, teachers, administrators, pilots).
- Limited local jobs, training, and vocational education availability in many communities.
- Inadequate climate adaptation planning due to limited workforce capacity and few local hires.
- Limited long-term career opportunities, also known as upward job mobility, for workers performing short-term infrastructure build-out jobs.
- Unreliable internet connectivity and cell service limits growth in work-from-home and distance learning opportunities
- Negative impacts of high-achieving student migration on the regional workforce (i.e., “brain drain”).
- Inadequate access to affordable childcare services impacting parents from entering the workforce.
- State funding does not meeting community needs for school renovations, facility energy costs, curriculum updates, scholarships, Head Start programming, and teacher salaries, which creates complex issues around education, economic development, workforce development, and quality of life.
- Systemic workforce barriers for residents with criminal backgrounds.