Final Report
Broadband Strategies Grant

Outreach
Awareness
Implementation
Over a two year period, the Association of Alaska School Board’s Consortium for Digital Learning (CDL) worked to deliver and provide awareness activities and outreach regarding the use of broadband in rural Alaska. Twelve select communities with varying broadband access enjoyed over 100 workshops, trainings and meetings with over 1000 community members, school personnel, and students participating.

Using the strong relationships CDL had through its member school districts and the feet on the ground in those communities in the form of elected school board members and school leadership, these workshops demonstrated a model of community engagement as each community grapples with the expanded world broadband brings to it. Though broadband access and capacity varies across these rural and remote districts, people welcome and look forward to the expansion of their world that broadband brings to support health, social, and economic needs and desires.

Most of the communities we visited required air travel in small planes, many times in sub-zero weather and landing on gravel runways. Who would have guessed that the best and fastest way to communicate about community functions in a remote Alaska village would be Facebook? Because we designed our visits to be over a series of months, people developed relationships with us and looked forward to showing us what they had done while we were gone. In most cases, they always had something to show about how they had expanded their digital presence and that it had a place of importance in their lives.

Our participants ranged from village basket weavers and jewelry makers, church clergy wanting a website, Alaska peony farmers needing digital presence, artists working in felt, etched glass, beads, paper-cutting, leather, and even handbags out of recycled rain-gear, to an Alaskan sourdough wanting to digitize historic pictures of community members, a fisherman wanting to live-stream catching his fish from his boat to potential customers in the lower 48, hand-made furniture makers, and even Native kuspuk designers.

Throughout the grant period regular communication regarding planning, guidance, and status was made with Connect Alaska and the Alaska Department of Commerce. We thank Connected Nation, Connect Alaska, the Alaska Department of Commerce, and the Association of Alaska School Boards’ Board of Directors for their support and encouragement in our efforts.

As this grant draws to a close, on-going activities and programs as next steps of this effort are actively being planned and pursued. We hope this report adequately demonstrates what we feel has been a successful project to underscore the importance of broadband to all of Alaska, but especially rural Alaska as we move our digital future forward.
As broadband internet coverage continues its steady expansion across Alaska, exciting new personal, business and education opportunities are becoming available in many remote regions of the state.

The Association of Alaska School Boards’ Consortium for Digital Learning was granted a sub-award from the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) through Connected Nation and Connect Alaska to conduct research and provide outreach and awareness through workshops on broadband strategies in select rural communities. Our goal was to inform, inspire, and engage residents across the state in learning skills that can position them to take advantage of the enormous transformative potential broadband access can provide.

Schools in Alaska are the centers of their communities and the Association of Alaska School Boards has rich trust relationships with every school district in the State. By drawing on these relationships and creating the vision of utilizing each school and its students and staff as resources to the community, we were able to make inroads into communities that are sometimes very difficult when “outsiders” attempt to do so. Our public workshops targeted Alaska communities with varying levels of broadband availability. The selected communities were isolated, even by Alaska standards, and most were accessible only by small plane. Each community was visited by presenters on three separate occasions to deliver two consecutive evening workshops, with daytime meetings scheduled with business owners, craftsmen, artisans, teachers, and community entities, such as local governments and tribal organizations.

In our work with the Broadband Strategies grant, we strived to meet people where they are. Local residents who attended our events generally had highly developed skills in specific areas, yet were not afraid to step out and develop new survival skills for changing times. This created a fertile environment for our facilitated discussions about how technology and the internet can be used to assist residents in a variety of ways.

Our community visits focused primarily on Outreach, Awareness and Implementation using a four step process:

1. Assess community broadband access
2. Raise local awareness of broadband opportunities
3. Focus participants’ enthusiasm for new opportunities through skill-building projects
4. Develop self-sustaining local support groups to advance concepts that were presented
During 2013-2015, AASB’s Consortium for Digital Learning conducted 120 Broadband Strategies workshops, meetings and training seminars in twelve geographically diverse Alaska communities that reached over 1000 attendees.
Community Coordination

A Local Organizer was identified in each community to assist presenters with workshop scheduling, event coordination, promotion, room and equipment setup, and followup.

Online Project Management

To improve logistics and communication between presenters and Local Organizers, a free web-based project management tool, Basecamp, was introduced in 2015.

To model technology use, we assisted each of our Local Organizers in setting up a Basecamp profile and learning how to use the application. We then used Basecamp exclusively to disseminate documents, media packets, posters, presentations, and other information to all members of the group. A shared calendar helped greatly with scheduling workshops.

The Local Organizers really embraced Basecamp and used it to more effectively to organize our visits.

Getting the Word Out

To promote Broadband Strategies workshops, Local Organizers were provided with media packets that included event posters,
written PSAs, and other information that was used to distribute throughout the community, place in local newspapers, and post online to community, organization and school websites, and popular local social media sites such as Facebook.

In addition, Local Organizers scheduled presenters for interviews with local radio stations and newspapers. Radio interviews included KOTZ in Kotzebue, KRBD in Ketchikan, KCUK in Chevak, and KACM in Glennallen.

**Workshops and Consultations**

Two consecutive evening workshops were conducted in each community. Workshop topics focused primarily on utilizing online government services, digital publishing, e-marketing and ecommerce.

Creation of content through different digital applications for personal or business web presence was emphasized to help attendees more effectively tell their stories, construct an online presence, sell their goods, and mobilize their businesses.

The workshop presentations attracted many local artisans and crafts people who were interested in learning how to better promote and sell their work online. Many participants were highly motivated to build a web presence and expressed interest in more opportunities to learn.
At the conclusion of the first night’s workshop, consultations with presenters were scheduled for the following day. These one-on-one meetings with individual participants served as opportunities for more in-depth discussion, focused work, and motivation to advance specific projects or interests.

Both the evening workshops and the private daytime meetings proved popular with participants. In each community visited, we encountered local residents whose interests ranged from a desire to learn new skills, to requiring assistance to move past a project barrier they had encountered. The combination of offering general information presentations and individual project discussions was very effective in meeting community needs.

Participants were generally anxious for our return and it was not uncommon for small groups of workshop attendees to hold meetings on their own to continue the work we started with them. In some communities, followup workshops on specific topics of interest were conducted via videoconference.

Upon returning to a community for the second or third time, portions of the evening workshops or daytime meetings would be devoted to following up on participant projects that were started during the previous visit, including support for website development, digital publishing projects, research into appropriate web solutions for specific e-commerce products, distance delivery co-
ordination between school districts in Alaska, and specialized school projects.

During a community visit, presenters also met with and/or presented to local Chambers of Commerce, Native corporations, city staff, school boards, district superintendents, school principals, and other regional organizations such as the Alaska SeaLife Center, Department of Commerce and Cooperative Extension Service, and the Alaska Peony Coop.

During each community visit, time was generally made to meet with teachers and work in classrooms to demonstrate digital learning strategies and tools. This strategy not only proved effective in increasing workshop attendance, but also resulted in increased use of technology in classrooms and, in some communities, the launch or expansion of a digital learning project within the school. An effort was made to attract students to the workshops, and recruit them to work with adult attendees. This pairing of youth and adults created working relationships that allowed work to continue after our visits had concluded.

Positive outcomes occurred in each community we visited. In some communities the focus primarily on raising awareness, while others were well positioned to launch sizable, more ambi-
tious projects. A mature local infrastructure and a few motivated residents can create a fertile environment for producing tangible outcomes, such as an organized community of artisans, efforts to make an indigenous language more accessible, local history preservation projects, thriving small businesses, and robust broadband availability.

**Digital Projects Generator**

Our visits to communities often served as a kind of “digital projects generator,” by identifying local needs and resources, helping to envision and develop projects, and assisting local residents in advancing them.

“The excitement that this first Broadband workshop generated in the Prince of Wales community is encouraging. There were some solid first steps made both on the commerce and the cultural levels. Plus, the ideas of future projects are a promising sign for the future use of technology to benefit the people of our island.”  - Julie Horpsted, Local Organizer
Chapter 2

Awareness

The Broadband Strategies workshops were designed to instill participant confidence by demystifying technology, providing guided demonstrations of simple-to-use apps, and facilitating engaging digital projects.
Optimizing Digital Life

The Broadband Strategies workshops generally attracted a mix of small business people, craftspersons, and folks wanting to learn skills relevant to personal or professional projects they were interested in doing.

Each presenter travelled with 5-10 iPads that were distributed at specific times during the presentations for participants to engage in hands-on activities, such as creating websites and digital books, guided explorations of specific apps, and taking a Connect Alaska survey regarding community access.

Skill building activities were used to acquaint workshop participants with possibilities based on their specific interests, including e-government, e-commerce, digital publishing, oral history projects, and more.

To support further exploration into interest areas, resource materials were disseminated in each community we visited, such as seamless tabletop backgrounds for taking professional looking photos of small items to post on an e-commerce website, and Square credit card readers for taking mobile payments using a smartphone.
Workshop Components

Evening workshops consisted of two parts: disseminating general information on topic areas that benefitted all participants, and hands-on time for attendees to practice skills or participate in guided demonstrations of apps and tasks. During second night presentations, time was often made for presenters to assist participants who had returned seeking help with specific projects.

Workshop presentations began with an overview of useful online resources and government services available, with examples from various websites.

Topics included:

- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), working through Connected Nation and Connect Alaska toward the widespread access, adoption and use of technology and broadband to improve all areas of life for Alaskans.

- Drive Your Learning offers free online learning courses on a variety of useful topics to help Alaskans advance tech skills and achieve success on the internet, on the job, and at home.
• Alaska Source Link helps to support small business growth and development in Alaska by offering training, education, technical assistance, financing, networking and other resources from over 140 in-state organizations.

• Buy Alaska is a program of the University of Alaska Anchorage and the Alaska Small Business Development Center that lists over 3,800 Alaska businesses in 135 communities, connecting consumers with value, choices, and local service.

• USA.gov online services and information available, such as qualifying, calculating, and applying for Social Security benefits.

• State of Alaska online services and information such as renewing vehicle registration, getting a driver’s license, getting a hunting or fishing license, applying for a Permanent Fund dividend, finding a job, getting a business or occupational license, and booking a ferry trip.

Following the overview of online government services, three main concepts were presented:

• ePublishing - Tell Your Stories: Alaskans live in such a unique place. Telling your story effectively helps to differentiate you from the rest of the online world. Make text, photos, audio and movies into interactive e-books that tell stories, preserve history and teach Native languages to future generations.

• eMarketing - Sell your creations: Take professional looking photos of your crafts, write compelling item descriptions, and create online store displays that attract buyer interest. Create

Photographing handmade craft items in Metlakatla using a seamless background
a compelling personal or business web presence.

• eCommerce - Mobilize your business: Use a smart phone and credit card reader to accept mobile payments anywhere using a smartphone and credit card reader. Set up an e-commerce shop to sell your creations online.

To support these concepts, a variety of content creation applications, and techniques for using them, were discussed and demonstrated. Making the most of the bandwidth that was available was emphasized. To address the collective interests and skill levels of workshop attendees, presentation topics were sometimes tailored to meet the specific needs of each community.

Topics included:

• eMarketing: Creating and telling your story (writing, photography, videography)

• Components needed to construct a compelling online presence for eCommerce, professional, social media, etc. (website, multimedia content, photography, writing, digital publishing, etc.)
• How to become part of online e-commerce communities. Beginner: Etsy, Ebay, Amazon; Intermediate: Website w/PayPal or Google checkout; Advanced: Social Media integration

• Building eCommerce and personal websites using Jimdo, Weebly, and Squarespace

• Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to improve your website's search results ranking

• Online and mobile payment options: PayPal, Google checkout, Square reader (includes free Square Market store with shopping cart, inventory tracking, analytics)

• ePublishing creation and distribution: Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced levels

• Accessing and creating educational and instructional content

• Online crowdfunding strategies for raising startup money for businesses and projects

Applications included:

Paper (art creation), GarageBand (audio recording, music composition, soundtrack), Book Creator (make interactive multimedia books on an iPad), iBooks Author (make interactive multimedia books on a Mac), digital photography and videography shooting
and composition techniques (iPad camera), movie editing (iMovie), Comic Life (art), and more.

Near the end of each presentation, a followup discussion was facilitated on the types of digital content that can be created, and how this content can be used to support a compelling online presence, such as a website for a store or an organization. At the conclusion of each workshop, iPads were distributed and participants were asked to use them to complete a Broadband Assessment survey.

**How workshop presentations evolved**

Presentation topics for first year visits:
Visit 1: Online Government Services, eCommerce Websites, Visit 2: Content Creation
Visit 3: ePublishing, Crowdsourcing

During the first and second years, a Connect Alaska survey was completed by attendees at the end of each workshop presentation.

**Digital Publishing**

By the second year, Digital Publishing had become a consistent theme in the presentations. There was much public interest in creating interactive digital books that captured photo, video and audio memories of seniors and elders for preservation of local history and culture.

To demonstrate how easy it can be to create and distribute a well-designed interactive digital book, sample text, photos, movies and audio were used to make a digital book that was specific to each community. iBooks Author for the Mac and Book Creator were featured apps, and were quite popular with participants. Books were often created onscreen during a presentation so participants could see and understand the process involved.

**Website Construction**

Participant interest in developing websites for e-commerce and personal use grew steadily each year. In response, several demon-
Demonstration websites for a fictional online store, Alaska Classics, were created using website building sites weebly.com, jimdo.com, and Square Market.

These sample e-commerce websites were used during presentations, serving as tangible examples of the main workshop themes: telling your story, selling your creations, and mobilizing your business.

**Post-Workshop Followup**

After community visits were concluded, various participant projects were followed up on as needed, and progress was checked during return visits. Project followup included ongoing support for website development and digital publishing, research into appropriate e-commerce web solutions, distance delivery coordination to school districts in Alaska, and specialized school projects.
The Broadband Strategies workshops have had a very positive impact, and have been transformative for many participants and communities. Our presence has been greatly anticipated in communities and schools we’ve visited.
Many workshop attendees have seen direct benefit from the development and refinement of web-based applications and resources that were presented. Feedback on our efforts has been very favorable.

*Nearly every community we’ve visited has implemented some sort of project that is a direct result of our involvement with them.*

Projects ranged from the world’s first global earthquake forecasting systems, nano-agriculture research on peonies in Kenai and a golf course restoration in Kodiak, tsunami marine debris monitoring in the Kenai School District, unmanned aerial vehicle mapping of coastlines and streams, digital projects of recording elder histories, 1:1 technology education project planning and implementation in Wrangell, local website building workshops for businesses, and the introduction of crowd-sourcing campaign development. Assistance with these projects and developing local capacity for them is a major focus.

Workshop participants have seen direct benefit from the development and refinement of web-based applications. Businesses that have not had a web presence now have one. People who have not been able to take mobile payments now can. Individuals have produced multimedia personal histories and shared them electronically with others. Groups and individuals have identi-
fied projects and campaigns for crowd-sourcing and have been successful at it. All of this would not have been possible without our community visits.

Inclusion of our project on the NTIA’s and White House blogs was notable. Anne Neville, Director of the State Broadband Initiative for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, visited Alaska in March, 2014 and spent time with Connect Alaska, learning about its work to expand broadband adoption, access, and use in the state. A summary of her findings, which include the Broadband Strategies workshops, was posted on the White House blog.

Presentations of direct or indirect projects related to this grant have been made to the following organizations:

- Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) Annual Conference, Legislative fly-Ins
- Alaska Society for Technology in Education (ASTE)
- Alaska Legislature
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Conference
- Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMSI)
- FCC Commissioner (during a visit to Alaska)
A presentation was made to FCC Commissioner Tom Chambers highlighting some of the work we did in different communities and projects resulting from our visit. A copy of this presentation was requested from the offices of Commissioner Chambers, Senator Mark Begich, Senator Lisa Murkowski, and Representative Don Young.

**Challenges Encountered**

Summers are times of vacation for both teachers and school administrators, and rural residents are engaged in subsistence hunting and fishing activities in preparation for winter. It was sometimes challenging to align planning and scheduling timelines with local seasonal activities.

Weather related travel issues are common occurrences in Alaska, especially in small remote communities that are only accessible by plane. Bad weather can delay flights for days, stranding travelers.

Busy village schedules centered around school happenings and community events can conflict with workshops times and negatively affect attendance. There were instances of workshops being cancelled or rescheduled due to funerals of village elders and basketball tournaments.

Relatively expensive broadband options compared to urban areas, and caps on broadband limits or school wireless network restrictions sometimes hampered intensive use during workshop presentations.

Workshop participants in some communities formed work groups to assist and support each other’s projects.
Communication flow with the Local Organizers in various communities to confirm dates and disseminate information and promotional materials was difficult to coordinate in the beginning. The utilization of the project managing tool Basecamp greatly improved communication and was popular among the Local Organizers.

Scaling up our workshops to include more communities sometimes resulted in overlapping dates. We’ve been fortunate to have very competent contractors available to assist with every event needed, who could also meet the demand for very specific technical and training requirements in different communities. These contractors brought expertise in community/business/government partnerships, technical systems engineering, and school technology implementation and integration. Ongoing projects in communities resulted from these relationships.

**Project Highlights**

Outreach and Awareness efforts have resulted in numerous projects being identified during initial community visits, and further developed and implemented in subsequent years. The evening workshops were popular among participants, and meetings during the day with potential partners and with school districts to
sustain our efforts were productive in expanding the awareness of broadband knowledge and utilization with the technologies they have currently, and are planning. Communities we visited were anxious for our return to further their projects and knowledge. Several are holding meetings on their own to continue the work we started.

**Ongoing Projects that Resulted from Workshops**

**Distance Learning Opportunities (Multiple Sites)**

Follow-up distance learning seminars were conducted with 3 communities: Manokotak (digital photography), Chevak (watercolor and illustration techniques), and St Paul (music instruction). Initial videoconference of sites for ongoing support of project goals was well received.

**Digital Books with Native Language (Chevak)**

Twelve interactive digital storybooks featuring the Cup’ik language have been produced for use in the school’s elementary Cup’ik language immersion program, with 12 additional books are in progress. This book series received a 2014 Contributions to Literacy award from the Alaska Center for the Book, Alaska’s liaison with the U.S. Library of Congress Center for the Book. During our first visit to Chevak in 2012 we toured the local radio station and suggested equipment upgrades they could make to improve the facility’s production capabilities. In 2015, the station’s production equipment and facilities have been dramatically upgraded to support their goal of becoming a regional production center for Cup’ik language digital multimedia projects.
HISTORY & CULTURE

The Pribilofs, named after the Russian navigator, Gavriil Pribilov, were discovered in 1786 by Russian fur traders; no Alaska Natives are known to have lived on the island prior to this point. They landed first on St. George and named the larger island to the north St. Peter and St. Paul Island.

In 1788, the Russian-American Company enslaved and relocated Aleuts from Atka and Unalaska to the Pribilofs[4] to hunt fur seals; their descendants live on the two islands today. In 1870, the now-American owned Alaska Commercial Company (formerly the Russian-American Company) was awarded a 20-year sealing lease by the U.S. Government, and provided housing, food and medical care to the Aleuts in exchange for seal harvesting.

In 1890, a second 20-year lease was awarded to the North American Commercial Company, however, the fur seals had been severely over-harvested and only an estimated 200,000 fur seals remained.

Workshops included digital publishing demonstrations, such as this ebook about the community of St Paul made with iBooks Author

Website Development and eMarketing (Glennallen)

A local technology trainer has been assigned to deliver monthly workshops on website development and e-marketing of local businesses. Worked with businesses to develop an organized approach to on-going e-commerce development and a strong cooperative effort with the local school district.

Ongoing Community Education (Haines)

Workshops were assumed by the Community Education program and Assisted participants in establishing numerous e-commerce websites and Etsy stores featuring a variety of arts and crafts.

eCommerce for Alaska Native Arts (Klawock)

This community is home to world class Native artists, including carvers, drawers, weavers and painters. Workshop participants were primarily interested in online e-commerce applications, ranging from websites for Bed & Breakfast, massage, an Alaskan gift registry selling local products, to creating an Etsy-type site featuring Alaska Native arts, and many more.

The local Prince of Wales Island Marathon updated their website in the hopes of expanding their audience. Established and new businesses benefited from our workshops. A variety of digital publishing projects were also launched, including how-to books.
on creating Alaska Native art that can help to ensure these skills and techniques are not lost to future generations.

**Digital Projects Generation (Kotzebue)**

Plans are underway for the school district to make these type of workshops available to all of their 11 villages through district funding. Multiple digital publishing projects launched involving City and Borough, Native health organization, and school district.

**eMarketing, eCommerce for Native Products (Metlakatla)**

Initial workshops led to hiring contract technology services to upgrade school network and devices, which has resulted in many new technology-based student instructional projects, and ongoing community engagement support from AASB. Assisted participants in launching websites for crafts, botanicals, ecotourism, a youth nonprofit, a cultural museum, storytelling and entrepreneurship.

**Increased Emphasis on Technology (Manokotak)**

Visits were very successful with presenters in meetings or workshops for 12 hours per day during each of three visits to the community. A solid group of artisans and crafts people came to all presentations and most teachers are involved in some supported technology/broadband project. The school has also launched a major iPad initiative for elementary level students.

**Research and Development (Nikiski)**

A nano-agriculture research project conducted by Kodiak students has been developed to assist local Peony farmers with soil reconstitution through distance delivery and with use of UAV’s, and to help develop their e-marketing plans and technology-based inventory control and ordering systems.

**Community Engagement (Seldovia)**

We assisted highly motivated community group to advance the city’s digital presence and develop a stronger community-school partnership. Assisted in the launch of multiple websites for local businesses and organizations were developed, including bed and breakfast, bar and grill, and a crafts cooperative. GarageBand for iPad was introduced to the high school band class, which resulted in the students creating ten compositions in one school day.
As a result of highlighting opportunities to maximize distance education in Alaska, the school district is developing a more formal relationship with the Alaska SeaLife Center in the development of project-based courses delivered at distance. Sparked interest in multiple local projects including personal history digital publishing and watershed aerial mapping using drones.

**Distance Education & Local Technology Projects (Seward)**

Working with Chevak students to create Cup’ik language interactive digital books for the school’s elementary language immersion program.
**Distance Education & Technology Expansion (St Paul)**

Use of distance delivery equipment and courses. First ever distance music lessons, led to outside technology services to expand school technology capabilities.

**Major School Technology Project, Increased Ties Between Students and Business Community (Wrangell)**

A 1:1 iPad project was initiated in the elementary school. Our workshops helped to establish strong ties between the school district and the business community, facilitated students from the high school technology class to assist local businesses with promotional and promoted e-commerce technology projects.

**In Conclusion**

We successfully created and refined compelling content that is appealing to rural audiences. A talented and successful team of contractors was developed. The challenges of scheduling and communication were met through the use of the project management system, Basecamp. This workshop model is being considered as an offering for AASB as a service to schools and communities as a model of community engagement, and several grant applications are being considered to support this effort.

*Seldovia Crafts Collective members work together to create an e-commerce website: [http://seldoviacrafters.jimdo.com](http://seldoviacrafters.jimdo.com)*
Rural Alaska is a unique and fascinating place, vastly different from its urban counterpart. When visiting and working in small, remote communities, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the cultural norms and pace of life you will encounter. Complex and sophisticated systems for getting things done exist throughout rural Alaska, yet these networks are often subtle and indistinct, bearing little resemblance to the processes urban dwellers may be familiar with.
Broadband Bushwhacking

Being off the road system without ready access to goods and services requires the development of a different mindset. Residents by necessity tend to be resilient, resourceful, independent and entrepreneurial, taking adversity in stride and continuing to move forward with their lives.

During visits to rural communities to deliver Broadband Strategies presentations and workshops from 2013-2015, here are some of the travel challenges we’ve encountered and lessons we’ve learned.

Schools are the Social Hub

- School buildings are designed as meeting spaces. Commons areas, gyms, or computer labs are good places to hold public presentations or workshops.
- Chairs, tables, projectors, sound systems, etc. are generally available for presentation use.
- Additional classrooms or conference rooms may be reserved for smaller meetings.
- Choosing schools that are technology rich enabled us to use their resources, which generally matched those of the community.
Acknowledge Community Rhythms

• Knowledge of local culture is a great help. For example, Alaska Native people are often very thoughtful. When asking questions to an audience, presenters should wait at least 5 seconds or more before expecting a response.

• “Village time” runs at a slower pace. The start times for presentations, meetings, etc. are considered approximate. Be prepared to wait 15-20 minutes for people to arrive before beginning a presentation.

• Name dropping of government officials or other people whom you may perceive as being influential can backfire and have a negative effect. Unless you are extremely well informed about the subtleties of the community's local issues and politics, it is better to avoid doing it.

• Sudden events in small communities affect the whole community. Situations such as a funeral, school testing, school vacations, unexpected inclusion into a state basketball tournament, etc. can result in the delay or cancellation of the best planned event.

Two Heads Are Better Than One

• It's best to have at least two persons visit a community together for multiple reasons:

• When necessary, two persons can split up to maximize meeting time with community members, school administrators and teaching staff.

Sheefish are plentiful during ice fishing season. Connecting with residents provides a wealth of knowledge about local customs and lifestyles.
Together, the diverse skill sets of both persons can be combined to bring added depth to presentations and one-on-one consultations.

Depending on the interests and needs of attendees, it is often necessary to split into two groups, with one person giving a presentation and the other facilitating a work group focused on 1-2 specific topics.

**Quality, Not Quantity**

- All communities have small groups of motivated people. It can be a productive strategy to seek out and work with these groups, rather than focus on generating large numbers of workshop attendees. Motivated people also tend to be influential in the community, so working with them to create successful projects can serve as inspiration to others and sustain the goals of any project.

- Craftspersons are great groups to work with. They have goods to sell and are looking to expand their clientele beyond visitors to the community.

- Pair youth and adults. Many adults we encountered were experts at their crafts, but knew very little about technology or e-commerce. Yet they were interested in learning new ways to do
business. A good scenario is to pair the adult with a student, young person or family member that has an interest in technology and has—or can learn—basic e-commerce technology skills, such as taking/posting photos and videos, writing descriptive text, and maintaining a website or Facebook presence.

**Relationships are Important**

- It’s all about trust and relationships. Finding the right local support person is crucial to success.

- In some villages, a person can live there for ten years and still be considered an outsider. This makes it difficult for them to assist you in establishing a solid network within the community.

- Don’t assume that everyone knows each other. Even in small communities, people are busy and get into rhythms of living that may exclude others. Making connections through common goals enable user support groups and the like to naturally occur.

- Building relationships between presenters and community members, as well as community members with each other, is important for program sustainability.

- Community members value having more than one opportunity to work on their ideas. Making repeat trips to a community helps to build momentum, establishes trust, and scaffolds skills learned so that meaningful projects can be accomplished.

- After the multiple community visits have concluded, presentations can continue to be distance-delivered using videoconferencing.
encircling. Schools in Alaska often have good videoconferencing capabilities. Offering additional workshops builds upon working relationships that have been established between presenters and attendees, and provides an opportunity for in-depth exploration of topics of interest to the community. Additionally, this ongoing support can attract new members, and result in the formation of self-sustaining community work groups.

**Flexibility is Key**

It is important to become familiar with “the way things work” in places you’re traveling to. Local knowledge abounds, and casual conversations with residents can yield a wealth of information to help visitors to better understand and operate within existing systems. Some of the challenges we’ve faced traveling and working in rural Alaska include:

**Air Travel**

To reach some destinations in rural Alaska, air travel may involve flying by jet, twin engine prop plane, and single engine prop plane. As you move further away from major air carrier routes to the more remote regions of the state, small single engine planes

*Boarding a morning flight to St Paul Island*
become the transportation norm between smaller hub communities and villages.

These “bush” planes are usually piloted by residents with local knowledge of the regional geography and weather conditions, so it is important to determine who the reliable pilots are. Ask the locals who they are most comfortable flying with. Mail planes are often the best option for flying to a village, but be prepared for your seat to be surrounded by mail bags and boxes of supplies. Weather is always a consideration and, in the end, it is your responsibility to determine if it is wise for you to fly or not. Knowledge of safe flying conditions is advisable. When there is bad weather, it is better not to go and reschedule your flight, rather than pushing a pilot to fly when there is hesitancy about inclement conditions.

Airport Infrastructure

Upon landing, the air taxi will drop you and your luggage off at the air strip and promptly take off for the next destination. It is common in villages to encounter gravel runways that have no terminal or enclosed structure in which to find shelter from the elements. It is very uncomfortable—and dangerous—to be waiting for pickup at an airstrip in minus 10
degree weather, while being insufficiently dressed for minus zero temperatures. Prior to your arrival, it is vitally important to call your host to ensure someone will be at the air strip to pick you up, otherwise you could have a long, uncomfortable walk in freezing temperatures. This is a good reason to travel light, since you may have to transport your luggage long distances by yourself.

**Ground Travel**

Upon arrival in a rural community, your destination may still be miles from the air strip. There may be a road, trail or boardwalk, or you might have to drive across a frozen river, lake or over land to get where you’re going. A variety of transportation modes may be encountered. Visitors might be transported on unenclosed vehicles that could include sleds, snow machines, four-wheelers or small boats. Enclosed vehicles—such as cars, trucks, or vans—may be available, but due to the lack of service and parts locally, they may not be in well maintained condition.

**Clothing**

You may be walking significant distances outside, or riding in unheated vehicles or planes, so it is critically important to dress for full exposure to inclement weather. Subzero temperatures are common and frostbite is always a concern during the majority of the year. Make sure you bring sufficient layers of insulated clothing that can cover all exposed areas of skin.

Villages are often located several miles from the airstrip, making for a long walk in sub-zero temperatures after the plane drops you off. It is critical to make arrangements with a local person to pick you up.
Food

Many villages have no restaurants, only small stores offering high-priced canned, frozen or packaged foods. You may be offered a prepared school lunch, but this should not be counted upon. Bring sufficient food to sustain you during the entire time you are in the community, plus a little more in case you face travel delays due to weather. When people in villages invite you to share a meal with them, they are being very generous and will offer you what they have. Be considerate of their generosity.

Accommodations

During our visits so far we’ve been fortunate to stay in school district or teacher housing, but you should arrive prepared to sleep on a gym mat or in a classroom, with only the use school building bathroom facilities for washing. Bring a warm sleeping bag.

Hygiene

Showers or laundry facilities may or may not be available. Bring a towel, enough clean clothes and toiletries to last for the duration of your visit.
Connect Alaska has an exciting new partnership with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) which is already yielding some wonderful results! The goal of the project is to do research in rural Alaska surrounding broadband, and to improve digital literacy for residents lacking basic computer skills.

At the end of March, Dr. Bob Whicker and Steve Nelson representing AASB’s Consortium for Digital Learning, and Frank Odasz, President of Lone Eagle Consulting, was in Chevak and Metlakatla, Alaska for the “Digitizing Alaska, Broadband Strategies” project. This effort is championed by AASB’s Consortium for Digital Learning and funded through a State Broadband Initiative grant awarded to Connect Alaska and the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development.

As part of the project, a group seminar called a “web-raising” was held in the Kashunamiut School District. Much of what was accomplished during the event can be viewed right now online!

Everyone who attended created a free e-commerce website at weebly.com. Elder Maggie Atcherian was one of the participants. With assistance from her grandson Matt, she created a slideshow of her crafts viewable at chevak.weebly.com and at art-ecommerce.weebly.com.

Frank Odasz describes some of the success stories in more detail. “Maggie’s grandson, Matt, is featured as the expert photographer!” said Odasz. “We used a free iPhone app, YouSpin, to create 3D rotating images.” The photo “spins” can be viewed at http://youspin.co/profile/steve/9956/spin/19571.

Participants also used the ExplainEverything app to help seniors create narrated slide shows with their historical photos. The app costs $2.99 and is available at www.explaineverything.com. See a short sample slideshow here.

“The process has been so easy that we’re planning to match elementary youth with seniors in mid-April at community events, as an intergenerational innovation to preserve elders’ stories and wisdom for all future generations,” said Odasz. “And we’re creating community websites as the hub to show off new websites and innovations. We’re also teaching everyone new e-publishing tools for social entrepreneurship opportunities, cultural celebration, and economic sustainability.”

Frank Odasz is more than excited about the work being done in rural Alaska. According to him, these events could be replicated in any community that has people creating arts and crafts, allowing residents to have a web presence in the global internet economy.

You can learn more about the Association of Alaska School Boards’ Consortium for Digital Learning at cdl.aasb.org.

A second QBook Slam was held in Chevak in April 2013. A traditional story of Western Alaska was adapted, illustrated and narrated by students in both English and Cup’ik languages. The completed art, audio and text files were uploaded to Kiwa digital developers who constructed them into a digital book. The result is An Encounter with Qamulek, the Dragger, a free iPad app available on the Apple App store.

Experience the Alaska QBooks for yourself! All three books are FREE to download on iPads from the iTunes Store.

You can learn more about QBooks from Kiwa Digital at the following links:

QBook - Bringing Stories to Life: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz6nlybGv9U


Dr. Whicker’s work through the Association of Alaska School Boards’ Consortium for Digital Learning is being partially funded through a State Broadband Initiative Grant (SBI) awarded to Connect Alaska and the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. Connect Alaska is working with Dr. Whicker to help support this Technical Assistance initiative, as well as others in rural Alaska. This is just the first success story to come out of this effort. Expect to hear many more in the months to come!
Living in today’s digital age, the possibilities are endless when it comes to creative ways to engage students and promote education through technology. New ideas are popping up everywhere, and it just so happens some of the most exciting ideas are coming out of rural Alaska!

One great example is...the QBook. Don’t know what a QBook is? You’re not alone. It’s a brand new application created by Kiwa Digital, a New Zealand based digital media company, which brings stories, lesson plans, songs, endangered languages, and more into a fun and interactive learning environment. One of the people leading the initiative in Alaska is Dr. Bob Whicker of the Association of Alaska School Boards. Below, Dr. Whicker explains more about his work surrounding two QBooks, We Are Alaska and Qunukamken, and what this technology means for the last frontier and the world!

“Qunukamken was conceptualized after we approached the developer, Kiwa Digital for assistance in developing curriculum for Alaska that included indigenous languages,” Whicker said. “Kiwa Digital secured digital rights to the Milly and Molly children’s storybook series and allowed us to record and put Alaska Native Language to the books. The Native Village of Afognak had interest in doing so in Alutiiq, and took advantage of the offer.”

As a result of this interaction and the interest that has been generated throughout the State in Alaska Native language revitalization, Kiwa Digital’s Managing Director Rhonda Kite and Project Director Zohar Lizlejohn were invited to speak at the Association of Alaska School Boards Annual Conference in November of 2012. During that time, We Are Alaska was born at the very first QBook Slam in the world.

Since that time, We Are Alaska has been downloaded over 1600 times from around the State and around the world. The Native Village of Afognak has requisitioned the Kodiak high schoolers who participated in the QBook Slam to fully finish their story, and is including Alutiiq to that QBook. Kashunamiut School District has requisitioned twelve Milly and Molly books to be recorded in Cup’ik, with three Cup’ik speakers doing the narrations of the stories. Metlakatla has also expressed interest in developing four books in Sm’algyax.

The stories, pictures, and sounds for both QBooks were developed by the participants in rural villages, so it’s truly an Alaska-made effort!