

**Staff Alliance**

208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



Date: July 8, 2025

To: President Pat Pitney, Chief Human Resources Officer Memry Dahl

From: Austin Cranford, Staff Alliance Chair

CC: Brian Smentkowski, Vice President Chief Academic Officer

Michelle Rizk, Vice President University Relations and Chief Strategy Planning Budget Officer

Re: Compensation Considerations for FY 27

The following compensation considerations for FY27 and beyond was developed by a dedicated compensation committee comprising staff from all three MAUs as well as the System Office, both Staff Council and Staff Alliance leaders, as well as general staff. In addition to meeting several times over the course of June and July to draft these recommendations, the committee also met with a representative from HR to receive further guidance on appropriate policies/procedures to better shape these considerations and their potential impacts.

Their recommendations were submitted to the Staff Alliance for final review and approval. Having completed that review we now respectfully submit the following for your consideration, in no particular value order.

The list of recommendations is as follows with details provided below:

- Fair and Competitive Compensation
- Conduct a new market study and compensation review
- Optimize Employee Health Benefits
- Re-evaluate Geographic Salary Differentials
- Increase the maximum percentage increase for in-grade adjustments by supervisors
- Maintain staff levels and evaluate workloads, and review the use of temporary and term funded positions
- Increase the Staff Development Fund, provide more consistent communication
- Additional days of parental leave
- Loyalty/Retention Bonus
- Non-mandatory Winter Closure
- Increase Frequency and Amount of Leave Cash-In
- Increase Tuition Waiver credit hours by 1

**Staff Alliance**

208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



- Add Juneteenth as a Paid Holiday
- Recognize Education Attainment through supervisor support for career development plans and reclassification processes

**Fair and Competitive Compensation**

Staff should receive a competitive compensation increase equal to or greater than the percentage negotiated with unions. Recent increases are not keeping pace with the market or inflation, so maintaining meaningful increases, while staying balanced with the state's fiscal environment, is critical to employee retention.

Staff are critical to the operation of the university and for meeting Board of Regents' goals and measures including the Roadmap to Empower Alaska. Compensation increases alone do not make up for years of staff feeling they are having to do more with less and inflation has greatly reduced the spending power of these increases despite budget stabilization.

**Conduct a new market study and compensation review**

While it is understood that the results of the Compensation Review and Market study from 2019 are no longer valid, many staff still feel the impact of having been promised compensation adjustments, and only receiving one year's worth. While that data and process may be long over, the need to address those funding issues, and the morale impact of not being able to complete those adjustments, still remain. We request the review be implemented again, a new market study conducted, and a process put into place to address under-market compensation across the system.

**Optimize Employee Health Benefits**

We request that future health care plan changes maintain the current UA/employee 82/18% healthcare split and continue to work on plan cost savings while maintaining benefits and limiting out-of-pocket expenses. Rising healthcare costs put a strain on both the university and employees, but we must refrain from shifting more of that burden onto staff and further damaging the university's reputation as an employer. We are paying considerably higher premiums than State of Alaska employees and need to remain competitive with our benefits and total compensation package.

**Staff Alliance**  
208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



### **Re-evaluate Geographic Salary Differentials**

We propose that the University of Alaska review and update its geographic differentials as allowed by Board of Regents' P04.05.060. *Geographic Salary Differentials*. The last time that they were updated was in 2016. There are still areas of the state, such as several of our Southeast locations, which currently do not have a Geographic Differential even though the cost of living is higher in those communities.

A Geographic Differential would encourage employees to continue living in their communities and would keep operations in-person, rather than shifting to remote. This promotes a feeling of connection on campus; when students come in, they'll see people rather than empty cubicles. It also improves public perception of the University if we are our students' neighbors and community members, rather than people on a screen. Likewise, keeping employees in-state and in-person helps recirculate the economy of our state, rather than money flowing out to other states via remote employees.

### **Increase the maximum percentage increase for in-grade adjustments by supervisors**

One of the challenges of retaining valuable employees is that the incentive to stay in a position is often far less than the incentive to move to another position or to move out of the UA system completely. Supervisors can give up to a 10% retention offer to keep an employee who has received an outside offer, but a 5% increase to keep them in the first place. In an environment where a supervisor is tasked with rewarding extra duties and/or covering for vacant positions, they should be given more leeway and UA specific supervisor training to adequately compensate their employees.

### **Maintain staff levels and evaluate workloads, and review the use of temporary and term funded positions**

We ask that the escalating use of temporary employees in permanent positions be evaluated, both for how it impacts turnover and for its effects on employee morale. Additionally, serious effort must be made to ensure coverage, cross training, and support for staff at all levels across the system. Too often, departments are filled with revolving doors of temporary employees, which results in significant loss of institutional knowledge gained from longevity.

**Staff Alliance**  
208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



In addition, we have heard about increasing use of positions being classified as term funded, even in cases where those positions do not depend on restricted funding, which can lead to anxiety and uncertainty for staff about their long-term employment. Therefore, we request that UA HR establish specific, enforceable guidelines on the appropriate use of temporary and term-funded positions across UA.

We must maintain or build up adequate staffing for student recruitment, retention and support in order to achieve our Roadmap to Empower Alaska and other enrollment attainment goals. If more staff are needed, they should receive full benefits and opportunities in the UA System as benefit-eligible employees.

#### **Increase the Staff Development Fund, provide more consistent communication**

The highly popular Staff Development Fund utilizes \$120,000 from the Natural Resources fund and has been used in its entirety since the program was started, meaning more staff apply than can be awarded. It's been observed that employees with stronger communications systems through their campus or university governance office have a better chance of receiving an award. We recommend both increasing the amount in the fund, as well as ensuring equal communication and program support system-wide.

#### **Additional days of parental leave**

UA recently created a parental leave category with 5 days of paid leave. The national standard is 10 days. Consider adding additional days of parental leave to the new benefit program to come closer in line with national norms.

#### **Loyalty/Retention Bonus**

As part of an expanded employee recognition program, staff would receive a small bonus for achieving specified time-oriented milestones at the university on the anniversary of their hire.

This bonus could be a nominal amount, and could encourage the employee to reward themselves for their dedication with something like a nice meal out. A loyalty/retention bonus can be an incentive used to retain skilled employees, as well as increase morale among staff, and would not be as cost-intensive as an across-the-board wage increase would be.

**Staff Alliance**  
208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



### **Non-mandatory Winter Closure**

Allow employees to work over the winter closure and make the winter break a soft closure. While winter closure is an important time for maintenance, upgrades, and saving on utility costs, requiring employees to use annual leave or leave without pay could create an undue burden for employees and limit their use of annual leave during the rest of the year. It is important for budget balances that employees use their leave, but requiring the use of a sizable amount of leave hours to a specific and mandatory time of year greatly limits employee freedom to use their allotted leave during other times of the year.

Employees hired later in the year (generally after October) may not have time to accumulate enough annual leave to allow them to take the winter break closure days with pay. They are forced to take these days without pay, which can put excess financial strain on someone already adjusting to a new job. This can also be seen as a morale dampener for new employees, who may in turn not stay long with the university.

Consider implementing a process for establishing a leave bank for employees hired late in the year so that they may avoid this situation; this bank may best be based on the employee's leave accrual rate at the time of hiring.

Some departments readily offer an in-house process for allowing employees to work over the hard closure if needed, but it often depends on the supervisor's knowledge of the process.

If switching to an entirely soft-closure is not possible, then a policy around electing to work should be created so that employees from all departments have equal access to said processes to avoid time without pay. Additionally, so as to not impede the work of our Facilities and Maintenance teams, opportunities for remote work during the closure should be explored when possible.

### **Increase Frequency and Amount of Leave Cash-In**

We request that staff not be limited to a single 40-hour max cash-in event during any given fiscal period, and recommend allowing a second 40-hour cash-in annually, if the employee has also used annual leave during the year. We request that the total amount of leave available for cash-in be capped at 80 as the new expanded limit.

**Staff Alliance**  
208D Butrovich Building  
2025 Yukon Drive  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 450-8042



### **Increase Tuition Waiver Credit Hours by 1**

The employee education benefit currently allows regular employees a tuition waiver of up to eight credit hours per semester, three of which can be taken during working hours. The Alliance recommends that this limit be increased to nine credits per semester and allow up to four of those credits to be taken during working hours. The primary motivation for the additional on-the-clock credit is to allow employees to take a gym class or similar course for the wellness and work-life balance benefits.

### **Add Juneteenth as a Paid Holiday**

Juneteenth commemorates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the United States. In 2021, Juneteenth became a federal holiday, officially named Juneteenth National Independence Day. In 2024, Gov. Dunleavy signed a bill to make Juneteenth a legal holiday in the state. Under the new law, the holiday will be officially observed beginning June 19, 2025. We are asking that the University of Alaska join the State of Alaska and Federal government in adding this day of recognition to our annual leave schedule.

### **Recognize Education Attainment through supervisor support for career development plans and reclassification processes**

The current Education Attainment program, which automatically awards increases based on degree attainment, is limited in the types of certifications/degrees that are eligible.

However, there are many other pathways for career advancement and professional certification that do not automatically earn a merit increase. In order to recognize a wider variety of professional certifications and awards/degrees we encourage training supervisors on how to incorporate training and certification programs into employee development plans and position reclassifications.