

Alaska's Priorities for and Role in the 2015 U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

A Week of the Arctic Report

The U.S. has begun to consider how it will approach its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, which begins in 2015. Now is the right time, we believe, to highlight Alaska challenges, issues and opportunities, as well as key themes that the Chairmanship should address.

THEMES

Sustainable and Healthy Communities

Alaskans care about each other and quality of life issues. This theme promotes local sustainability and resilience in the face of change and includes: food and water security, the well-being of human systems, the health of ecosystems, and education and opportunity for residents of the Arctic. Sustainability here encompasses cultural, social and economic factors as well as the environment. Sustainable development should reflect: subsistence needs; the incorporation of traditional knowledge; healthy communities; and accessible, affordable energy.

Sustainable Energy and Responsible Resource Development

Building on the previous theme, the responsible development of energy and resources is a foundational underpinning of Alaskans' ways of life. Alaskans can take a leadership role by developing basic principles for development. Responsible resource development (e.g. fishing, mining, energy) includes science-based and informed decision-making, using the most effective technology. Emerging technology needs research funding to support it. Development should result in revenue for local communities and government, as well as the state. Multilateral regimes can be leveraged for economic development in the Arctic, as well as respond to a changing climate. Energy development in remote areas should take into account feasibility, affordability and security.

Emergency Response Capacity

Alaska needs an enhanced search and rescue and oil spill preparedness and response capability. The capacity for Arctic emergency response should focus on marine and aviation infrastructure (including ice-breakers), as well as communications.

Transportation Infrastructure

Alaska's Arctic needs a comprehensive shipping protocol and should address issues of a Polar Code, environmental challenges, SAR, maritime infrastructure, navigation-ROLO, and UNCLOS. The state also needs to advance transportation infrastructure and policy to create safe, secure and resilient supply lines. The same infrastructure would also support healthy, sustainable communities.

An additional theme of significant importance is the necessity of increasing indigenous participation in the Arctic Council. In preparing for the U.S. Chairmanship, Alaskans hope to see increased participation and high-level inclusion of Arctic peoples, including: indigenous organizations and governments, regional and sub-national governments, and local communities. Funding should support the increased inclusion/participation.

Alaskans also identified a critical need for clear, accountable governance of the Arctic Council, including expanded outreach and communication.

ROLE FOR ALASKANS DURING CHAIRMANSHIP

- 1 There is a clear need for a formal role for Alaskans in setting the agenda and a desired role in co-chairing the Council during the U.S. Chairmanship. The SDWG Chair should be from Alaska.
- 2 The State Department should communicate with Alaska's Governor to encourage State of Alaska participation in working groups. A similar request should be sent to Permanent Participants to increase indigenous participation as part of the U.S. delegation in working groups.
- 3 Alaska should work to develop a clear understanding of the Arctic Council. A system to empower Alaskans to engage in the process should be developed, with multiple opportunities for project participation. A scholarship fund should be established to support participation.
- 4 Alaska can focus on its role as host through the selection of a host committee. The committee can showcase Alaska and communicate the results of work done during meetings. The host committee can provide an opportunity for visitors to learn while they are in the state and develop meaningful programs for people who visit.
- 5 Alaska should encourage meetings to take place in the state, where they would be publicly visible and accessible. Alaskans can develop a list of venues and logistics. Meetings should take place outside Anchorage when possible.
- 6 Alaska and the U.S. can mentor young Alaskans to grow into Arctic roles with better understanding of processes in circumpolar north.
- 7 Alaska should take a leadership role in pushing toward active cooperation between the Canadian and U.S. Chairmanships. In this, the state can work as a partner with Canada's territories to promote shared goals of healthy communities, transportation infrastructure/emergency response capacity and energy/resource development.
- 8 Alaskans should examine the image and message that visitors will experience. This means firmly grasping Alaska priorities, promoting Alaska issues while working closely with the federal government, and clearly understanding international and circumpolar issues and politics.
- 9 The State Department should practice/model public inclusion now so that it's well-developed during the Chairmanship. The U.S. Senior Arctic Official should establish a formal communication method/channel, which could include a role for the current ad hoc working group, to engage and educate Alaskans, build relationships and foster an inclusive approach.
- 10 Alaska has an opportunity to build bridges with Permanent Participants and/or observers within the state.
- 11 There should be a nationwide public awareness campaign about the U.S. as an Arctic nation – the Chairmanship is a great opportunity for education. Alaska should develop a promotional video and materials that could be used to showcase Alaska's Arctic.
- 12 Alaskans can help the Congressional Delegation communicate Arctic issues to colleagues and grow lower 48 understanding of Alaska's issues, while developing a better idea of how Alaska fits into national interests and America's Arctic.