

Science and Social Studies Adventures (SASSA)



15 July 2020

Linda Chisholm
Cultural Resources Program Manager
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(907) 246-2154

Dear Linda Chisholm:

The purpose of this letter is to clarify that we understand the objectives of this project, some of the challenges affecting this project, the general ideas for executing the project, and to suggest negotiable ways in which Science and Social Studies Adventures (SASSA) can partner with the Sugpiaq-Alutiiq community and the National Park Service in Alaska, to provide services that will advance this project over the next academic year (September 2020 – August 2021) and possibly the next several years. We are willing to learn and grow, so all items within this letter are negotiable.

SASSA acknowledges that by being part of this project we are working in the traditional homeland of the Sugpiaq-Alutiiq people.

As SASSA understands it, this project is part of a larger initiative, “Partnering with the Elders” started in 2018 by [President](#) Gerald Krosbruk, ~~the president~~ of the Native Village of Perryville, [Ms.](#) Edna Smith, [Executive Board Member](#) of the Council of Katmai Descendants, and Christina Phillips, Katmai [NP&P](#) archaeologist. The mission of this project is for **Alaska Native youth to connect to and become invested in their identity, especially as it pertains to their cultural heritage, through place-based exploration of their heritage at Katmai Village and the greater Katmai parklands.** The vision is **the preservation and perpetuation of cultural knowledge and practice.** The motivation for this project stems from local Elders’ concerns over the potential for cultural [loss extinction](#) due to a growing disconnect youth have [to](#) [with](#) their [Native heritage ancestry](#). To achieve these goals, high school students within the Alaska Native community will participate in classroom learning experiences that will culminate in archaeological fieldwork at Katmai Village in the summer of 2021. Fieldwork will be done in partnership with Katmai [NP&P](#) archaeologist, Laura Stelson (Penn State), who is completing a PhD based on archaeological research at this location. In classroom materials will prepare students to have more deeply meaningful experiences when they visit Katmai National Park.

Several challenges to this project are:

1. **Generational gaps in knowledge.** Western-style education systems, including boarding schools, prevented Alaska Native students from learning important local traditions through practice and mentorship with their elders that resulted in significant loss of language and cultural transmission.
2. **High turn-over rates in teaching staff.** Low retention and continuity of teaching staff in rural Bush Alaska villages hinders the meaningful incorporation of local Alaska Native cultural history and traditions into the educational curriculum.
3. **Underutilization of ethnographic resources.** Elders have already assisted in providing a body of knowledge, for example through oral histories and interviews with [university](#) researchers and [park](#) staff, that could be shared with youth and has not yet been incorporated into the educational curriculum

A healthy, ongoing relationship with all invested individuals and groups is necessary to overcome these challenges and fully realize this vision. Over the next year, SASSA would like to commit to developing the basis for such a relationship by getting to know the individuals who are invested in this project; learning about the cultural histories at Katmai; working with all members on the project to cultivate a practice of working together that is beneficial for all; and, collaboratively seeking additional funding to support ongoing work so we can continue to work together beyond this first year.

Through our services, SASSA provides community-engaged, collaboratively created opportunities for youth to learn and engage in research at the intersection between science and social studies. To facilitate this in the first year, we can create four modules that can be either presented in class or printed for take-home delivery. During this first year, the purpose will be to provide a baseline connection between Perryville and the historic village of Katmai, with the potential for select students and adult mentors to participate in fieldwork with Laura Stelson and Katmai National Park staff. These modules will center indigenous voices and mainstream indigenous knowledge within the educational curriculum. Based on preliminary conversations with NPS we suggest the following themes:

1. **What is Katmai?** This is an exploration of the history of Katmai Village and the greater parklands including its people and the environmental and ecological context. We will look at the different ways in which people have approached this history and the different ways in which it has been communicated.
2. **Archaeological History & Practice.** Students are introduced to the history of archaeology and an overview of the tools and practices within the field. How ~~was has~~ archaeology ~~conducted been done~~ in the past? We will take a critical look at how laws that are designed to protect ~~places and cultures people and cultures were created~~ have been made and implemented. We can explore which archaeological methods appeal to the students and why that might be. We will include and emphasize the importance of consultation as one of the tools that is important to cultural stewardship now and in the future. As an example, students could shadow consultation meetings to learn how it is being done and to begin to build relationships with the park and other partners.
3. **Decolonizing Archaeology.** Students engage in discourse concerning the decolonization of archaeology. This can be done by exploring what students know about Katmai Village, who they learned from and how it was communicated. ~~Who and what was centered in these teachings? Why? Who and what was left out? Why? How did those that shared this knowledge come to know what they know? Why did they take that approach?~~ Are there other ~~ways of knowing? approached they could have taken?~~ How does this affect what we know? How can we create spaces where different ways of knowing can sit together?
4. **Place-based Identity.** Students explore how they see themselves collectively and individually within the context of Katmai's history by exploring questions such as: What factors shape a person's identity? In what ways are our identities passed on to us? In what ways do we decide our own identities? To weave a shared story, we will explore how young people feel connected to ~~(and explore disconnectioned from)~~ their cultural heritage.

We would like to propose the following for the modules as well:

1. **Connecting with community.** Prior to writing the modules, asking elders, teachers, parents, and young people, what do they think young people should know or want to know about their story. It is our hope that these conversations foster intergenerational discourse, and that interest in both the development of this program and the projects created by the students will encourage

the engagement of the broader [Alaska Peninsula Bristol Bay](#) community with Katmai's history and cultural resources.

2. **Incorporating Sugpiaq-Alutiiq language.** To the extent that is possible, we will incorporate [and introduce](#) the Sugpiaq-Alutiiq language in the learning modules. Language is culture and mainstreaming Sugpiaq-Alutiiq in the curriculum mainstreams the culture.
3. **Disseminating knowledge.** Together we explore possible ways in which the students can share what they are learning more broadly. Some ideas include contributions to a "zine" or ethnohistory book; digital storytelling through an online platform such as the NPS website; a book; individuals sharing their journey and research through SASSA's Youth Engaging in Research Program (YERP); using social media platforms that are part of youth culture to share their work; and having cultural exchanges with indigenous high school students in Minnesota.
4. **Regular assessments.** We would also like to discuss the ways in which we can assess the value SASSA brings to the partnership. Though we know what we can and cannot offer, we acknowledge that we are not the arbiters of whether what we have to offer is truly beneficial. We want to make sure that there are ways for us to check in and ensure that it is appropriate for us to be involved and, if so, that we are accountable to our involvement.

We want to thank you for considering us for the project and we look forward to the prospect of being part of this important and essential endeavor.

Best Wishes,



Katrina E. Yezzi-Woodley
President and Executive Director
Science and Social Studies Adventures