

Introduction: Place and Context

Chugachmiut is submitting this proposal for the **Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Early Phase Grant** under **Absolute Priorities 1 and 4** and **Competitive Preference Priority 2**. We are proposing the Chugachmiut Identity Project to introduce a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention to high school students (9th through 12th grade) in three partnering schools in Alaska, in the Alaska Native communities in the Kenai Peninsula School District. This project proposal will create an iterative intervention to empower our region's students, teachers, families, and communities through cultural/place-based intervention for lasting academic achievement, psychosocial skills, and improvements in SEL factors.

Chugachmiut is an Alaska Native Tribal Consortium and 501(c)3 nonprofit, incorporated in 1974 to serve and promote the self-determination of the seven tribes of the Chugach Region in southcentral Alaska. A seven-member Board of Directors governs Chugachmiut; each board member is appointed from one of the constituent Tribal governments. Chugachmiut manages a \$23.2 million annual budget with a service portfolio comprised of programs funded by the Indian Health Service (IHS) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), other Federal agencies, the State of Alaska, and philanthropic foundations. Services provided are incredibly diverse, including education, healthcare, behavioral health services, family counseling, substance abuse treatment and counseling, Federal Head Start programs, forestry management, land use management, and Heritage Preservation.

Predominantly representing Alaska Native Sugpiaq and Eyak peoples from the Lower Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound regions of Alaska, the Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Program has provided education services about Sugpiaq and Eyak culture and identities for regional school partners since the early 2000s. Recently, Chugachmiut adopted a Code of Education and expanded Heritage Preservation into an inaugural Tribal Education Agency (TEA) and is fulfilling a federal Office of Indian Education State Tribal Education Partnerships grant to formalize a multi-region tribal education partnership. As a TEA, the Chugachmiut Tribal Education Department (CTED) provides education services with our four partner Local Education Agency (LEA) school districts in more than seven schools that serve high schools.

This grant is submitted as a consortium partnership with CTED and the Kenai Peninsula Bureau School District (KPBSD). This LEA partner has provided a letter of support to operate as a sub-grant project member. The intervention will occur in the three high schools in this district, and the project will also incorporate a study in nine other neighboring schools across the region that serve as comparable control groups. This consortium partnership's

oversight will be provisioned in a comprehensive Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that will commence at the start of the grant-funded project.

Significance of the Project

High-Need Youth: This project addresses the underserved and high-need American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students in the Chugach region in southcentral Alaska. Our students are often students of color and experience poverty rates of over 30%.¹ Our AIAN students are in exceptionally high need due to both historical and ongoing colonization and erosion of Native knowledge ways, resulting in many predominating factors of trauma.² AIAN people have a long history of being forced from our lands and separated from our families and cultures³. These issues pose disconnecting forces for our people, which are also exacerbated by issues that are shared by the non-AIAN students in our community as well; issues such as climate change, racism, and COVID-related traumas are several more pressures on our high-needs community.⁴ As such, this project will center the AIAN perspectives but will encourage participation from all students in the intervention site schools because these traumatic forces are shared by all groups of youth, especially conflicts facing the students' identities, families, communities, places, and spirituality.⁵ Losses in connection manifest as disparate health conditions like mental health issues, suicidality, and higher drug and alcohol use, as well as reduced academic performance, increased dropouts, lower self-esteem, decreased community involvement, negative self-image, and cultural shame.

The unmet needs of Native youth populations are extensively well documented.⁶ When compared to general populations, AIAN youth are disproportionately represented in school discipline, face higher enrollment in special intervention programs, have lower rates of retention and graduation, lack access to an adult educator/mentor with their cultural background, and report feeling disconnected from their schools. In our region, AIAN students have lower rates of attendance and graduation as well as higher dropout rates.⁷ In the broader context of the State of Alaska public education system, 75% of AIAN students have scores qualifying them as "needing support;" this is more than doubly prevalent than the same statistic for "all students" at only 37%. Unmet needs also describe mental and cultural wellness, which are increasingly significant factors that justify the need for an SEL intervention **(Priority 4)**. For example, statewide figures for suicidality show that 25.6% of AIAN students responded that they had attempted suicide, while 19.7% of all students had reported the same response.⁸ A working assumption in this project is that low wellness factors are due to low cultural connectedness in the schools. For example, in the Valdez High School, the Climate and Connectedness data shows the compelling need for a culture-based intervention that

improves SEL outcomes: only 35% of students responded favorably regarding their school “supporting their cultural identity,” and 66% of students self-rated positively on a social-emotional skills assessment.

In exploring the cause of these issues, we present a literature review that Demonstrates a Rationale centered around the following **Problem Statement:** High school students (grades 9-12) in the Chugach region of Alaska face social-emotional learning (SEL) challenges, identity development, and academic achievement due to their schools' discordant and unintegrated learning frameworks.

Intervention: Our intervention seeks to address the effects that stem from the problems impacting our youth, including colonization, trauma (historical, family, COVID, climate change), and systemic racism, which are embedded in Eurocentric decontextualized regional curriculums by reconnecting youth through place-based, culturally relevant, and identity building teaching. To address youth identity, health, and academic challenges, we propose a holistic intervention that is grounded in connectedness through identity-based learning, Indigenous education pedagogy, place-based learning (Indigenous, community-based, and remote/rural), trauma-responsive learning, as well as whole learning, and culturally responsive education.

This intervention recognizes many key components as interconnected aspects of learning, as shown in our Theory of Change diagram (shown right). We contend that addressing somatic problems is done through the holistic approach and will lead to proximal outcomes benefitting student academics and distal outcomes benefitting broader mental health, as well as school-level structural change

A central hypothesis of this research is that developing a strong identity by connecting to family, community, spirituality, and place and improving school engagement leads to healing trauma and mental health as well as academic achievement for not only AIAN youth,^{9,10,11,12, 13,14,15} but for all youth.^{16,17,18,19,20} We recognize that mediators like race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, home environment, and learning styles/differing abilities can affect connectedness, SEL, and academic achievement. We offer this intervention as a comprehensive approach for all students to participate.

Indigenous pedagogy is holistic, recognizing the identity and person in learning and addressing their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.²¹ While Indigenous pedagogical approaches vary from place to place — as they are each based on place-based knowledge— commonalities have emerged in the literature. These commonalities are shown below:

- **Place-based learning (PBL).** Place refers to people's connection with the lands and waters they live on and those from which someone is ancestrally from.²² PBL incorporates the resources, challenges, and perspectives of one's place as integral components of the learning format.
- **Community-based learning.** Bringing community into the classroom and the classroom into the community are important responsibilities of an Indigenous classroom. Schools that bridge the gaps between their classrooms and place/community create supportive learning environments with shared teaching responsibilities and integrated cultural differences, leading to markedly improved student achievement.^{23,24} Looking specifically at education in rural Alaska, education must be locally controlled and made relevant to place and community needs.²⁵
- **Culturally responsive education (CRE).** CRE brings student cultural values into the classroom, learning about the local environment, identities, knowledges, languages, and pedagogies. It is centered around solid relationships between the school and community and developing a curriculum that integrates Indigenous and local knowledge through bringing community knowledge holders and expertise to the classroom.²⁶
- **Identity-based education (IBE).** IBE is emerging as a primary center point in national discussions on approaches to teaching.²⁷ The neurologically informed²⁸ Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines have been recently updated to incorporate these vital identity elements as critical practical elements of whole learning experiences.²⁹ Acknowledging identity as a learning factor³⁰ is a converging step between the dominant society education models and Indigenous education pedagogy.
- **Trauma-responsive interventions (TRI).** The predominance of trauma can limit intellectual, social, cultural, and personal growth,³¹ permanently impact learning,³² and limit the successfulness of interventions.³³ Readiness to learn can only shift when the student is placed in a commanding role within their perspectives of adversity and trauma³⁴.

In discussing these elements of Indigenous learning, we also emphasize the importance of **Whole Learning**, which occurs through the interconnection between community, culture, and self-expression.³⁵ Although this pedagogical idea also resembles core aspects of Indigenous learning models,³⁶ place-based identity approaches to learning are also integral to multicultural and universal approaches. The learning continuum between community, culture, and self has been disrupted by contemporary mainstream approaches that minimize place-based aspects in favor of broader objectified cultural influences on learning³⁷ and cultural homogenization.³⁸ Our theory of change

identifies that strengthening youth identity and connectedness to place, culture, and community will lead to overall educational improvement and trauma healing for the students.

Significance of the COVID-19 pandemic

A resounding trauma story for millions of our nation's children was the story of fear, uncertainty, and lost opportunity that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. During school closures, our children endured more than lost opportunities for skill development.³⁹ Our children endured the erosion of support systems, increasing mental health burdens, and proliferating crises of self.⁴⁰ Although predominant research on the pandemic's effects often discusses the experience as causing a skill-acquisition deficit, our research approach looks beyond the transactional framing of school interventions. Instead, it discusses the opportunity to tell a holistic recovery story from trauma. Therefore, the universality and national importance of this project's research focus are tremendously important. An identity-focused pedagogy must understand how to equip students with creative outlets to acquire the self-actualization potential of how to heal from this collective trauma event.

Application Priorities

Absolute Priority 1: The significance narrative above demonstrates a strong rationale for the project, explaining how previous research ties connectedness, Indigenous pedagogy, PBL, CRE, IBE, TRI, and Whole Learning to student SEL and academic achievement. Considering this problem, The Identity Project (IP) was selected as the adaptive intervention to utilize documentary arts to build connections to identity development and learning and foster SEL and academic improvements. IP empowers marginalized youth with an invaluable opportunity for self-actualization, improving readiness to learn on the most fundamental level.⁴¹

Additionally, The Identity Project approach is a field-initiated intervention, and its design has been crafted since 2016 by the Identity Project leadership with partnerships in Southwest Indian Tribal Nations and schools. Our extensive literature review provides strong evidence that this practical approach can lead to improving student SEL and healing from trauma.

Absolute Priority 4-Intervention that Meets Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs: The Identity Project addresses student social, emotional, and academic needs by incorporating evidence-based practices in social-emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive pedagogy. These approaches support student social and emotional needs by creating trauma-responsive learning environments where students can heal and develop healthy coping mechanisms,⁴² strengthening cultural and positive identities and self-esteem with connections to community and place,⁴³ and supporting social connections through collaboration with families and communities. Further details

regarding this information is enclosed in the Theory of Change, Logic Model, and Goals & Objectives contained elsewhere in this application.

Competitive Preference Priority 2: The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the AIAN population as it posed unique problems to our ways of living⁴⁴. For instance, reduced marine highway infrastructure affected our remote communities, drastically limiting access to resources like food and fuel. The social distancing restrictions between families and neighboring villages exacerbated the food insecurity of this era as inter- and intra-Tribal relationships were put on hold. Recovering from food insecurity has become a substantial legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic in our coastal communities.⁴⁵ Additionally, with some of the highest rates of COVID in the US, communities lost many Elders who were not only knowledge holders but mentors and grandparents to the students we are serving.

As a specific pressure for almost all communities, COVID has led to exacerbating childhood traumas like stress, anxiety, depression, and more.⁴⁶ The extent to which these unique factors have affected Tribal education is still under-studied, particularly in our community. Thus, we will begin this project by conducting community asset mapping and a needs assessment of students who are disengaged from learning. This needs assessment will also include students not participating in instruction to guide an intervention research plan that can understand the preliminary needs of COVID-19 and how the intervention facilitates improving them.

Project Design

This project is a partnership intervention with Chugachmiut and three regional schools in the KPBSD. The grant will support five years of development and implementation of this intervention's curriculum and instructional design. The following section discusses the project design, our goals, objectives, how we will accomplish these objectives, and how we will measure objective completion. This includes work with our principal investigator (PI), project director (PD), the Identity Project implementation team (IP), administrative and specialist Chugachmiut staff serving as project coordinators (PCs), and the external evaluation team (EE team).

The logic model for this proposal shows the full component framework of how the IP will be tailored to Alaska as an iterative and adaptive intervention that will support staff capacity, SEL and academic development, and an improved understanding about the role of Indigeneity and identity in schooling. The components of this logic model have been used to develop the goals, objectives, and workplan which are summarized in the following pages.

In the table below, **Goal 1** addresses our **Development Stage**. As a partnership with three local Tribes, 2 LEAs, the CTED, and the IP, we will develop a joint working plan via an early Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

to guide and govern this project. This partnership will be led with regular convenings with the schools, PI, PD, PCs, and IP first to adapt the IP curriculum to our place, culture, and community needs (**objective 1.1**) and to guide iteration and future growth (**objective 1.4**). Creating this program involves covering two parallel strategic points: [1] fully developing the SEL curriculum, co-teaching pedagogy, instructional coaching plan, and local master-artist mentorship series with collaboration between the LEA sub-grantees and the IP personnel, and [2] providing feedback of student needs, mainly due to COVID-19 and related to disengagement and community assets (**objectives 1.2 and 1.3**). The curriculum developed in year 1 is a pilot that will be revised yearly throughout the project to address lessons learned and better meet student and community needs. The EE team will be involved throughout this process to work closely with the PI to develop an evaluation plan and tools that can measure student, educator, community, family, and school outcomes, including SEL, academic, psycho-social-emotional, culture, support, community, and family engagement as well as project fidelity (**objective 1.3**).

Figure 1: Goal and Objectives for the Development of the Identity Project

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| Goal 1: Develop a living Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention for 3 Chugachmiut high schools in Alaska for students (grades 9-12) from January to August 2025. (yearly curriculum revisions through 2029) | |
| Objectives | Outcomes |
| 1. Ensure that community voices govern the intervention. | 1. Meeting agendas/notes |
| 2. Develop the 48-month, place-based documentary storytelling curriculum, pedagogical framework, and revising it yearly. | 2. Signed MOA |
| 3. Conduct community needs assessment and asset-mapping student disengagement and engagement in learning. | 3. Finalized curriculum |
| 4. Develop an evaluation plan and tools to measure curriculum impacts. | 4. Strategies for student, teacher, co-teacher, and artist recruitment |
| | 5. 12 artists and 3 co-teachers signing recruited with signed agreements |
| | 6. Needs assessment and asset-mapping report. |
| | 7. Evaluation Plan with pre/post surveys |
| | 8. Yearly revised curriculum |

After the project is developed, this project’s success will hinge on the active and meaningful collaboration between the local classroom teacher and a Tribal Education Specialist (also known as an “artist educator” in past IP programming). This co-teaching duo will be actively trained in the Whole Learning teaching and learning pedagogy presented in this proposal, including Indigenizing Education and building somatically active students through art

education. The co-teaching unit will convene over a class of high school students daily and will administer lessons in the IP's documentary storytelling curriculum. Furthermore, the curriculum and instructional perspectives of the IP are to develop a master class style series where all participating students can engage with 12 Master Artists each year, learning about place-based expert art perspectives as they build their identity stories. In reaching these components, **Goal 2** is described below and addresses **Teacher Training and Community Connections**, and the objectives address the project team meeting each aspect of the IP with fidelity. **Objective 2.1** ensures that, in the first months of this project, the sub-grant team will hire three Education Specialists and partner them with three classroom teachers employed by the school district. **Objective 2.2** ensures that the school districts will create a course for administering the IP class and its components. **Objective 2.3** ensures that IP will deliver on-site immersion training each project year (two immersive training courses per year) and monthly training for a *Creativity in Praxis* (CiP) documentary storytelling professional development series. The EE team will evaluate the fidelity of these components and the proposed outcomes related to staff improvement.

Figure 2: Goal and Objectives for the Implementation of the Identity Project

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| Goal 2: Improve teachers' capacity to affect students' Social Emotional Learning outcomes by hosting continued staff training and integrating pedagogy to foster collaborative teaching with community connections from August 2025 to May 2029. | |
| Objectives | Outcomes |
| 1. Recruit and train artists as co-teachers, providing training to teachers & artists to implement IP. | 1. 90% attendance at all training & coaching (2 immersive trainings, 8 CiP and 20 bi-weekly coaching sessions) |
| 2. Integrate the IP curriculum into credit-bearing classes for participating students (4 days per week, 45 minutes per day). | 2. Staff training agendas & attendance lists |
| 3. Improve educator awareness of essential evidence-based practices at work in the current landscape of liberatory education. | 3. 12 teacher/staff surveys and assessments of SEL capacity, climate & connectedness. |
| | 4. Records of schools establishing new courses as credit-bearing |
| | 5. Partnership agreements with community artists. |
| | 6. Lesson plans with community artists. |

Goal 3 addresses this project's **Student Learning Outcomes** as an intervention aimed at student improvement.

This goal is to develop an evaluation story about the effectiveness of IP intervention. The objectives in Goal 3 comprise the main proposed outputs that address the community needs described previously in this proposal.

Students will develop media by expressing their identity and ties to their place. Data teams will actively measure the incorporation of culture in learning, track student attendance, graduation rates and timeliness, and student retention, and survey students on their psychosocial support through engagement with their peers, family, community, and educators. The IP will follow the data for iterative program development and reporting, and the EE will follow the data for program evaluation of fidelity and comprehensive reporting.

Figure 3: Goal and Objectives for Improvement of SEL Factors in Students and Schools

| Goal 3: Improve participating students’ SEL factors (identity, belonging, and placehood) and school factors (psychosocial supports, cultural supports, and academic outcomes) from August 2025 to June 2029. | |
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| Objectives | Outcomes |
| 1. Improve students’ practical SEL skills of identity, belonging, and place-hood. | 1. 45 students complete identity story capstones per year; a total of 180 students served. |
| 2. Develop psychosocial supports between students, families, the community, and educators. | 2. 80% of students improve SEL evaluation scores. |
| 3. Improve student attendance, retention, and graduation rates. | 3. 3% improvements year-over-year (YOY) in student attendance rates each year. |
| 4. Improve climate and cultural engagement factors. | 4. 3% improvements YOY in student retention rates each year. |
| | 5. 3% improvements YOY in graduation rates each year. |
| | 6. Qualitative school observations showing cultural and psychosocial growth over time. |

Goal 4 addresses the **dissemination and expansion** of the program to other Chugachmiut high schools. Project staff will openly license to the public all copyrightable grant deliverables created with Department of Education grant funds, including educational software, curriculum materials, professional development training materials, assessment systems, etc. In the final year of the project, the components of the Chugachmiut IP curriculum will be formalized in manuals, videos, training and coaching methods and programming, implementation handbook, and family and community engagement strategies. From the project implementation and evaluation data, observations, and stories, the PI, PD, EE team, and IP will develop publications of the project that meet What Works Clearinghouse standards with reservation to be published in academic journals (i.e. *International Journal of Indigenous Education, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association*), policy briefs to document the intervention, outcomes, and share the role culture, place, and identity play in student SEL, psychosocial learning, and academic outcomes. The project team and participants will also

present findings in Tribal, inter-Tribal, national, and international conferences: the National Indian Education Association, the Sealaska Heritage Institute Our Cultural Landscape, the Alaska Federation of Natives, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. We will do this to inform other Tribes, the Alaska Department of Education, and other prospective communities to discuss the project and facilitate the hand-off of implementation materials. We will also be working throughout the grant to have funds for the sustainability and scaling of the project through submitting other grants and writing an EIR Mid-phase grant.

Deliverables include the signed finalized curriculum, evaluation plan, revised curriculum, training completion reports, surveys and observations, school performance data, the external evaluation report, the final report to funders, academic papers, policy briefs, conference presentations, and developing future grant proposals.

Figure 4: Goal and Objectives for the dissemination of Chugach Identity Project Research and Curricula

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| Goal 4: Broaden this project’s integration of Indigenous and dominant educational praxis by sharing models and project findings with other Tribal and education communities (primarily in year 5, with grant writing starting in year 2). | |
| Objectives | Outcomes |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate the effectiveness of SEL intervention based on place-based cultural knowledge and Indigenous pedagogical approaches for interconnected learning to Tribal, inter-Tribal, national, and international audiences. Develop a scaling plan to incorporate all schools in the Chugachmiut region. Utilize a public outreach network to scale and guide other districts in implementation. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation publications for expansion with fidelity Academic publications: 2 policy briefs, 2 journals, Presentations at 4 conferences 6 communities visited or reached 2 Alaska Native Education Program grants submitted EIR Mid-Phase grant submitted |

Project Personnel

Hiring and staffing policy: Chugachmiut makes every effort to identify and secure the most qualified candidates for available employment positions in our Tribal communities. The entire governance leadership and most Chugachmiut employees identify as AIAN. We strive to embrace hiring practices that represent the diversity of our community and continue the development of Alaska Natives in the workforce. We recruit from Native communities, tribal colleges, the Rural Student Service program in the University of Alaska system, and through the

federal grants supporting the operation of CTED. [REDACTED] also provides leadership to Indigenous wellness as a community volunteer, serving as a Project Coordinator for Alaska Native Traditional Healers from 2013 to 2016 and on the Bristol Bay Foundation Board of Directors from 2023 to the present.

[REDACTED] is the Director of the Chugachmiut Heritage Programs and will serve as the co-Project Director for the Chugach Identity Project. [REDACTED] is Yup'ik and a Tribal member of the Curyung Tribe. [REDACTED] has an extensive career in public and Tribal education spanning four decades and has been a rural Alaska superintendent of schools, federal program director, principal, and special education teacher. [REDACTED] has earned a master's degree in special education from the Oregon College of Education and is a PhD candidate in Bilingual/Special Education with the Oregon State University. [REDACTED] has been leading the Chugachmiut Heritage Programs for seven years.

[REDACTED] leads the **Implementation Team** (The Identity Project-IP). [REDACTED] developed the seeds of the Identity Project while serving in the AmeriCorps and received the honor of finalist for the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Leaders Fellowship in 2020. Her work has led to many Identity Project awards, including the grand prize at Oberlin College's LaunchU pitch from the Forward-Thinking Museum in New York and exhibitions supported by the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture and New Mexico's Public Education Department. Alesandra's work is supported by a network of Indigenous artists who draw on local expertise and specialists in various art disciplines. These specialists include [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Iñupiaq-Inuit), [REDACTED] (Chicana), [REDACTED] (Diné), [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Afro-Indigenous, Aniyunwiyah), [REDACTED] (Diné & French), and [REDACTED] (Diné).

[REDACTED] (**Project Coordinator**) is the Program Manager for the CTED and will serve as the Project Coordinator for the Chugach Identity Project to provide logistics and technical assistance to contractors and sub-grantees. [REDACTED] is Iñupiaq, a Tribal member of the Noorvik Tribe, and an education and administrative professional with prior experience in tribal grant coordination and project management as Prevention Coordinator for Cook Inlet Tribal Council from 2021-2023 and Alaska Strong Coordinator for the Anchorage School District in 2023. [REDACTED] has a B.S. in Public Health from Brigham Young University with a concentration in Promotion and a minor in Indigenous Studies.

The **External Evaluator**, Alaska Technology and Development Group, Inc (ATDG) has performed planning, evaluation, and strategic support for 35 companies representing Tribal, nonprofit, Alaska Native corporation, federal

government, and LEA service providers in Alaska. The Lead Evaluator, [REDACTED], is Dena'ina and a Tribal Member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. [REDACTED] is an instructor of Rural Development with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, a Kellogg Fellow, and has provided planning and technical support to more than 30 AIAN serving companies. [REDACTED] is a former director of the Tanana Tribal Council, the Tanana Chiefs Council, and the Executive Director of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. ATDG's Co-Evaluator, [REDACTED] is Dena'ina and a Tribal Member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. [REDACTED] is a licensed Special Educator with experience as a Tribal Administrator, Tribal Education Director, LEA school district federal program manager leading a \$4 million annual program of over 60 employees in 40 schools, and LEA school district curriculum coordinator. [REDACTED] has served as a Cook Inlet Historical Society director and an advisory director for the College Board, the National Indian Education Association, and the Alaska Teacher Preparation Program.

Management Plan

An organizational chart for the Chugach Identity Project is included in the appendices of this application. In the chart: Governance structures and committees are in blue; administrative roles are in yellow; project contractors/partners are in red; and sub-grant awardees hired and overseen by LEA partners are in white. Solid lines represent direct administrative authority, while dotted lines represent authoritatively collaborative roles and responsibilities between team members.

The project will be governed at three levels. All project team members will comprise a Leadership Circle, which will constitute a subcommittee of the Tribal Education Committee. The Leadership Circle will oversee funding, timelines, and accountability of reporting and data systems and facilitate a decision-making coalition of project members. The Leadership Circle will meet at the frequency described in the work plan in the appendices of this application. The Tribal Education Committee will oversee the project's goals and report overall project results to the Chugachmiut Board of Directors.

In describing the authority processes in this grant, the Board of Directors of Chugachmiut will oversee operations through Executive Director [REDACTED], with whom the sub-grant MOA will be constructed with the LEA partner. Sub-grant partners have provided their organization charts for this grant, summarized in the bottom portion of the chart above. Deputy Director [REDACTED] will oversee discretionary grant administration processes by managing the company's human resources systems, accounting, contracting, records, grant management, and assessments. Deputy Director [REDACTED] will also oversee the final reporting of all PI, IP, and EE contractual responsibilities. The CTED is structured under the Deputy Director and will oversee all main

components of this grant as PD as described prior, with the Chugachmiut Heritage Programs under the CTED as co-PI for components described prior.

Roles & Responsibilities of Project Staff

Principal Investigator (PI [REDACTED]) Will lead overall project execution, oversee research design, ensure project goals are met and milestones achieved, and assist in reporting. **PI [REDACTED]** will be both a leader and strategic planner: 1) provide leadership and oversight of the project; 2) design project goals, objectives, performance measures during the grant ensure the project continues to align with these and the timeline as well as developing performance measures into evaluation tools with the evaluator; 3) oversee implementation and progress of all activities, being involved to make sure the work is tailored to the region, recognizes the Indigenous population, and is tied intricately to place as a central aspect of culture as a protective factor; 4) will meet regularly with the PD, PCs, and EE team, as well as partnering schools, teachers, and artists to gather lessons learned and adapt the project when necessary; 5) will coordinate closely with the PD, IP, and PCs to develop the curriculum and student activities as well as make sure activities are executed smoothly; and 6) will work with the EE team to make sure the evaluation tools are able to measure the impacts.

Project Director (PD [REDACTED]) Will lead the overall implementation of the project, ensuring that activities align with the project goals and objectives, develop partnership connections, liaise with Tribal governance and committee structures, and advertise and recruit qualified candidates. The PD will serve as the primary point of contact for all project-related communication and decision-making in this multi-pronged partnership program and will lead the dissemination with other Tribal Education agencies during the dissemination portion of the project. Main responsibilities that the PD will perform are related to 1) leadership and coordination; 2) oversight of curriculum development via the IP; 3) oversight of staffing via LEA partners and training via IP; 4) project management, including collaboration with PI and EE to ensure effective evaluation connections; 5) community engagement, including especially fostering conversations with other LEA and TEA groups for dissemination; 6) project evaluation and reporting; and 7) sustainability and dissemination.

Co-project director (co-PD [REDACTED]) will ensure the continuation of Tribal cultural art forms as Master Artists are recruited to serve as contractual partners with the schools. The co-PD will oversee Tribal relations, facilitate Master Artist collaboration and participation, and access the Chugachmiut cultural archive. The PD and co-PD will

represent their respective Chugachmiut programs in this project's leadership components, including on the Leadership Circle.

Identity Project (IP): Lead curriculum/training development and implementation. The role of IP is detailed in the implementation project design section on pg. 8.

Project Coordinators (PCs): [REDACTED] will lead at the administrative level, and each Project Specialist hired at the local high school level will hold the responsibility of administering the program as PCs. PC [REDACTED] will report to the PD to provide administrative support, communication and liaison within Chugachmiut departments, logistics and coordination, monitoring and reporting of plans and management plans, and support for local school staff, including training for teachers and artist-educators employed by the grant. Funding for contractual Master Artists will also be facilitated through the main grant and overseen by the Chugachmiut PC and LEA PCs.

At the school level, each LEA PC will lead and assist with curriculum development, implementation, data collection, stakeholder engagement, documenting, and reporting, and will participate in training and development and evaluation support. Referred to as “Project Specialists” in this grant for clarity, each participating school will hire one Specialist with a minimum qualification of at least a bachelor’s degree or equivalent and four years experience teaching Tribal youth or managing grants. The LEA PCs must have experience as artists or in culture-bearing settings. The local PCs will be employed through a sub-grant to their local school district, and to ensure cohesion with school operations and logistics, these staff will be supervised and evaluated by the LEA administration. These staff will facilitate project coordination as grant managers at the sub-grant level and will provide reporting to the Chugachmiut PC.

External Evaluator (EE): Will conduct culturally appropriate independent evaluations, analyze data, and report findings, including monitoring control and experimental intervention groups, collecting baseline data, performing ongoing monitoring of data and testimonials, analyzing data, reporting regularly to the project team and TEC, and ensuring project fidelity with an independent report of grant activity. This role will be detailed in the Evaluation Design section below pg. 16.

Evaluation Process

The project will utilize an iterative and adaptive evaluation approach, incorporating internal (PI [REDACTED] and independent external evaluators (ATDG). The evaluation process will be ongoing throughout the project's five-year duration, aiming to understand outcomes and revise the curriculum annually. ATDG's expertise in curriculum

development and Tribal evaluation positions them as the ideal evaluator for this project. PI [REDACTED] will serve as the internal evaluator, with PD [REDACTED] assisting in developing and implementing surveys and evaluation tools.

Independence: The EE did not help develop this evaluation plan and will not implement the intervention but will independently evaluate the project through data collection, analysis, and reporting study findings. This will be further maintained by their data and analysis being separate from other project data. Confidentiality: The EE will secure IRB approval or exemption from the Alaska Area Institutional Review Board and conduct all work ethically with the confidentiality of students and all project data. Project data will also be secured. Summary of Intervention: A full description of the intervention is on page 8. Data will be collected to understand if this model of delivery and mediators influence the outcomes we have predicted.

Evaluation Standards: All surveys, observation protocols, and data collection strategies will be piloted and refined before full-scale implementation through coordination with the EE, PI, and PD. Additionally, protocols for observations and surveys will be standardized and consistently applied throughout the project. The External Evaluator (EE) will collaborate and communicate with the Principal Investigator (PI) and Project Director (PD) throughout the project through regular video meetings as well as in-person meetings. At the beginning of the project, we will develop a clear plan for reporting results so they can be integrated into the implementation process. This will improve project planning, allow for curriculum modifications yearly, and support annual reporting to the funder.

Meeting the WWC Standards with Reservation

Intervention/Fidelity Evaluation: As this is an early-phase intervention, the first iteration of the intervention will serve as a pilot (school year 2025-26). We will begin by developing a detailed fidelity checklist. The fidelity evaluation will focus on documenting activities and further developing protocols to measure fidelity through observations of teacher training and student lessons. Fidelity evaluation will focus on assessing the IP curriculum's adherence to the plan, the capacity of instructors, and the effectiveness of instructional methods. Additionally, we will evaluate the curriculum's appropriateness for student age and development levels and gather feedback from teachers and students on the program. This data will guide annual curriculum revisions and contribute to developing the final curriculum for broader dissemination.

The teachers trained to deliver the curriculum to the students are part of this holistic intervention and theory of change, expecting to see effects in the students, school, teachers, and community. This will be measured through the

abovementioned observations and with interviews with participating teachers, schools, families, and community organizations regularly working with the school to assess fidelity and changes in teaching and other outcomes.

Figure 5: Intervention/Fidelity Evaluation

| Program Performance Measures | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent was the project implemented as planned? • Were the core elements of the Identity Project (IP) curriculum delivered effectively? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor attendance and participation rates in the program quarterly • Conduct surveys with teachers and project staff to assess implementation fidelity quarterly • Monitor progress and milestones with an implementation/progress checklist monthly • Review lesson plans and curriculum materials to ensure alignment with goals during curriculum development and at the end of each year to revise curriculum • Observe program sessions to assess delivery methods and student engagement. (site visits and online once a semester for all four intervention years) |
| Questions and Measures for Teachers | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the project change teaching practices (and how)? • Do they believe they can and now do things differently? • Did the project improve collaboration and communication between teachers and communities? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and post-intervention surveys with teachers to assess changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. • Focus groups or interviews with teachers to explore their experiences with the project and its impact on their professional development. • Observe teacher interactions with students to see if they incorporate SEL and culturally relevant practices learned through the project. |
| Questions and Measures for Communities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the project strengthen partnerships between schools and communities? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews or focus groups with leaders and community members to gather feedback on their experience with the project. |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the project increase community involvement in supporting student success? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze school-community partnership activities facilitated by the project to assess their effectiveness. • Track participation rates in community events or cultural activities connected to the project. |
| <p>Questions and Measures for Schools:</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the project contribute to a more positive and culturally inclusive school climate? • Did the project foster stronger relationships between students, teachers, and school staff? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze school climate surveys to assess changes in perceptions of school culture and inclusivity. • Conduct interviews or focus groups with school administrators and staff to gather their perspectives on the project's impact. |

Impact Evaluation: ATDG will evaluate the efficacy of the IP lead co-developed SEL curriculum on students through a rigorous quasi-experimental design (QED) impact and implementation evaluation across four years that will meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Version 5.0 Evidence Standards with Reservations. The evaluation will use the Example Evaluation Plan for Quasi-experimental Design developed by Abt Associates as a guide. This evaluation will inform yearly curriculum revision and produce actionable findings by generating evidence that aligns with the WWC reservations and standards. ATDG will compare student outcomes between three treatment schools, which will receive the curriculum, and control schools, which will not.

Impact/Effectiveness Evaluation: The impact study will use a quasi-experimental design (QED) to assess the impact of the localized version of the Identity Project on a set of student outcomes during the four school years the intervention will be implemented (2025/26, 2026/27., 2027/28, and 2028/29). The evaluation will focus on high school students in grade 9 (four cohorts of 9th graders) who self-elect to sign up for the intervention-created elective class (offered in experimental group schools). Students will be tracked longitudinally throughout high school to compare outcomes with historical data and students not in the intervention.

Matched Comparison and Selection: To ensure the Chugachmiut Project’s impact is accurately measured, we will implement a rigorous propensity score matching (PSM). This approach strengthens causal inference by minimizing selection bias and creating comparable treatment and control groups at baseline. We will select key baseline variables for matching, including student demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity), baseline performance

metrics (e.g., standardized test scores), and socio-economic factors (e.g., free/reduced lunch eligibility and parental education levels). These variables are critical as they influence academic achievement and social-emotional well-being, ensuring that treatment and control schools are comparable and enhancing the validity of our causal inferences about the project's effectiveness.

Our PSM procedure will involve several steps. First, we will develop a logistic regression model to estimate each school's propensity score, reflecting its probability of receiving the intervention based on the selected baseline variables. Next, we will calculate these scores for all schools and use a matching algorithm—such as nearest neighbor or caliper matching—to pair each treatment school with one or more control schools with the closest propensity scores. The matching process will be meticulously outlined step-by-step, including the specification of matching variables, estimation of propensity scores, matching of schools, and balance assessment. To assess the balance of baseline variables between the treatment and control groups, we will calculate standardized mean differences and use balance plots to inspect the distributions of covariates before and after matching visually. If significant imbalances are detected, we will refine the matching criteria by adjusting the algorithm or incorporating additional covariates. This iterative process ensures that we achieve a satisfactory level of balance, allowing for more accurate impact evaluation.

For transparency, we will include a flowchart in the final evaluation plan to represent the entire matching process visually. This flowchart will illustrate the steps from variable selection through final matching, clearly depicting how the treatment and control groups are aligned. Additionally, we will document all decisions and adjustments made during the matching process, including the rationale for chosen variables, details of the matching algorithm, and any modifications implemented to improve balance. This comprehensive approach will ensure our matching process is transparent, reproducible, and robust.

We will consider baseline equivalence for treatment and comparison schools when the difference is less than or equal to 0.25. This helps ensure that any observed differences between the groups after matching are likely due to the treatment or intervention being studied rather than initial imbalances in school characteristics. Each school (treatment or control) with its academic year of 9th-grade students will be considered a block. The cohort years will be compared with one another, and at the end of cohort 4, all students in treatment and control will be compared. Control group students will be 9th graders at control schools without exposure to the intervention. Within the treatment schools, where students self-select into the intervention, we will employ covariate adjustment methods in

our statistical analyses. This involves including the baseline covariates as control variables in our regression models to adjust for any residual differences between the students who opt into the intervention and those who do not.

Primary Research Question: Does taking the intervention elective course in 9th-grade increase student SEL factors and academic achievement through graduation (specifically for AIAN students)? Study Sample: The impact study will start in August 2025 once the curriculum and evaluation tools have been developed and the three treatment schools sign memorandums of understanding to participate in the project. Cohort 1 will include 45 treatment students and 2 teachers across the three treatment schools. Cohort 1 runs during the 2025-26 school year. Cohort 2 (during the 2026-27 school year) will comprise 45 new students across the three schools and the same teachers, who will receive continued training. Cohort 3 (during the 2027-28 school year) will comprise 45 new students across the three schools and the same teachers, who will receive continued training. Finally, Cohort 4 (during the 2028-29 school year) will comprise 45 new students across the three schools and the same teachers, who will receive continued training. We estimate 180 students participating in the intervention over the four years.

Baseline data for all 9th graders in treatment and control schools will be collected before the intervention, including 8th grade GPA and socio-economic status. Both treatment and control students will be evaluated quarterly on attendance, GPA, and credit accumulation. Data will be tracked longitudinally, with a focus on graduation attainment for Cohort 1 and dropout rates for all cohorts. Student scores on the AK STAR English Language Arts and Math exams (9th grade) and AK Science exams (10th grade) will also be tracked. Graduation attainment will be monitored for Cohort 1 by the end of 12th grade, while drop-out rates will be tracked annually.

To measure the project's impacts on student SEL factors, interpersonal, and psychosocial-emotional measures, a survey will be developed and refined with the project team (to ensure cultural sensitivity) in year one of the project before the start of Cohort 1. It includes valid and reliable scales of SEL factors (deriving from our conceptual framework and theory of change). This Student self-selection to participate in the program at treatment schools will be accounted for on the pre-test survey given at the start of every cohort and demonstrate possible unmeasured differences between those self-selecting and the control cohorts. We also account for mediators: race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, stable home environment, learning styles/differing abilities, and perceived family and community support.

This survey will be administered three times during the 9th-grade year (beginning and end of each semester), with a modified version given annually afterward. After that, a modified and much shorter version will be provided

at the end of every student's school year while the project is ongoing to measure lasting impacts. Control and treatment students will also participate in separate small focus groups at the end of the intervention year to discuss SEL factors, school belongingness, and well-being.

To address attrition and manage missing data in this project, a comprehensive plan will be implemented to ensure the robustness of the evaluation findings. A detailed tracking system will also be established to monitor student engagement and attendance throughout the intervention. In cases of missing data, advanced imputation methods, such as multiple imputation or maximum likelihood estimation, will be used to handle gaps while preserving the integrity of the dataset. By systematically addressing attrition and employing rigorous data imputation techniques, the project aims to maintain the validity and reliability of its impact assessments, ensuring accurate evaluations of the intervention's effectiveness.

Figure 6: QED: Student Evaluation

| Domain | Outcome Measure | Timing of Measure | Baseline Measures |
|--|--|---|---|
| Academic Achievement (Quantitative) | Attendance Credit accumulation GPA | End of each quarter (Cohorts 1-4) | 8 th grade GPA Socio-economic status (all will be collected before the intervention using district data) |
| | AK STARS (English/ math assessment) | End of 9 th grade (Cohorts 1-4) | |
| | AK Science assessment | End of 10 th grade (Cohorts 1, 2, & 3) | |
| SEL Factors, interpersonal and psychosocial emotional supports (Mixed Methods) | Survey (addressing mediators) | Beginning of 9 th grade 1 st semester (Cohorts 1-4) End of 9 th grade 1 st semester (Cohorts 1-4) End of 9 th grade 2 nd semester (Cohorts 1-4) | |
| | Observations | Middle of 9 th grade 2 nd semester, observe students learning | |
| | Focus Groups | End of 9 th grade intervention (Cohorts 1-4) | |
| | Follow-up survey | End of 10 th grade (Cohorts 1-3) End of 11 th grade (Cohorts 1-2) End of 12 th grade (Cohort 1) | |
| Attainment (Quantitative) | Graduation | End of 12 th grade (Cohort 1) | |
| | Drop-out year | End of each year (Cohorts 1-4) | |

Analytic Measures: The outcomes measured to examine the effects of the IP curriculum on students are the 9 described above in the table. The impact analysis will examine outcomes for students who self-selected into the IP curriculum elective course in 9th grade and those 9th-grade students who were at a control school in the same year. To account for cluster assignment, we will use multilevel modeling (also known as hierarchical linear modeling) to

adjust for standard errors for clustering. This method will help us account for the nested structure of the data (e.g., students within schools). We will adjust for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni correction or the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to lower the chance of false positive findings when examining outcome domains such as credit accumulation and GPA.

In addition to the previously used propensity score matching to define the comparison schools, we will assess the equivalence of the comparison and treatment schools in each analytic sample for each outcome. This includes ensuring equivalence for students with non-missing post-test data and non-missing data for the baseline measures outlined in the table above. T-tests will be used to analyze English language arts, math, and science assessments to determine if the intervention significantly increases these scores (using $\alpha = 0.05$). The analysis will examine cohorts separately and combined. By examining individual cohorts and pooled data, we aim to capture cohort-specific effects and general trends over time.

Qualitative data will be rigorously analyzed as well through thematic analysis. This involves identifying and categorizing key themes, patterns, and insights from the data in a transparent and replicable manner. Additionally, findings from qualitative analyses will be triangulated with quantitative data to enhance the robustness and validity of the overall evaluation. By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative results, the assessment can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact and effectiveness, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of how and why specific outcomes are achieved. By also bringing together the results of the fidelity, intervention, and impact evaluations, we comprehensively understand the intervention's effectiveness and its broader impacts on the community and its relationships with families, the school, and student support.

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