

## PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The IMLS Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries can help the Aniak City Library engage the “Community Memory” of Aniak.

The Aniak City Library is a very small library, one of only four libraries in a region of Alaska which encompasses about 50,000 square miles. The City of Aniak is in a very remote region of Alaska, located on the south bank of the Kuskokwim River. It lies 92 miles northeast of Bethel and 317 miles west of Anchorage. As of the census of 2000, there were 174 households, and 133 families residing in the city. The racial makeup of the city is 68.36% Native American. In the city, the age distribution of the population shows 40.9% under the age of 18, 6.8% from 18 to 24, 27.3% from 25 to 44, 20.3% from 45 to 64, and 4.7% who were 65 years of age or older. The median income for a household in the city was \$41,875, and the median income for a family was \$43,750. The per capita income for the city was \$16,550. About 11.8% of families and 14.0% of the population were below the poverty line, including 13.4% of those under age 18 and 12.5% of those age 65 or over. Many residents of this area depend upon subsistence fishing and hunting, and a possible three months of sporadic summer construction work. The high cost of living is directly related to the fact that everything must come in via summer barges or air freight, as there are no roads connecting Aniak to the rest of Alaska. Travel between local villages on the Kuskokwim River is done with small planes or river boats in the summer, and snow machines in the winter.

Most of the available recorded history of Aniak involves very early accounts documented by historians such as Oswalt; the history of the FAA’s construction of the Aniak Airport; or the occasional oral history of a relative, conducted as part of a school assignment by the Kuspuks School District. While it is important that these histories exist, it is also important to recognize that these histories were recorded long before the conversations about the appropriation of native history and culture began. Most of the history of Aniak that comes up if you “google” Aniak was documented through the eyes of non-natives and copyrighted in their publications. There were first-time teachers who came to Aniak and designed oral history projects as part of their master’s thesis, and then left. Even the school district, with the best of intentions, collected and digitalized many of the school’s projects and slapped their “copyright” on the collections without receiving permission to copyright. More and more family elders, who held Aniak’s history in their memories, are dying without their memories being recorded. The communal *not copyrighted* memory that could weave all the individual histories of Aniak together, is being lost.

The Aniak Public Library is nothing like a library in a larger urban community. There is no professional librarian. Usually the library is staffed by individuals who often have not had library experience before the City hired them. Many people who moved to Aniak remember the library as one their first jobs. Quite often there are volunteers who simply want to contribute to the continued existence of a public library in Aniak. Currently the library has two part-time staff, a new resident with library experience, and an Aniak tribal member who worked with the library’s previous librarian. The Aniak City Library functions on a small budget from the City of Aniak. The City provides a building and pays the rent on the property that the building sits on. Currently the library does not have an inside bathroom but relies on a portable toilet that the City

maintains. The library offers limited hours, supported in part by an IMLS grant to the Aniak Tribe. The hours are chosen primarily to meet the needs of Aniak's youth after school, being open from 3 to 7 p.m. on Thur. & Friday, and Saturday. The library building is about 20' x 24' with one main room and two small storage rooms. The walls are covered with bookshelves, there are two 8' folding tables for computers, a small child-sized table for two youngest patron computers, a bench, and one worktable where the librarian works.

Like most libraries, technology has changed what a community uses a library for. Hardcopy books have become less of a priority as electronic media becomes more in demand. When you walk into the Aniak library now, half the patrons may be using the computers, and the other half accessing the internet with their cell phones. The Aniak Public Library is the only location in the community that offers free internet (wi-fi) access. Like many rural Alaskan communities, the Aniak library relies heavily on the OWL internet services support program, and the Alaska State Library System's services. The library could not exist without them.

But the library can offer more to the community of Aniak. The City has a vision of someday building a larger library designed to fit the needs of our community. To someday have a space large enough to have an "Elder's Room" where the Elders can sit and tell their stories or look at Aniak's history with each other over tea. A space where they are not disturbed by the younger patrons, but where they can invite the youth to join them. It will be some time before the City will be able to find a way to fund such a space. But even with the limitations of the current library building, there are ways to bring more of the library resources to the community.

The IMLS Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries can help the Aniak City Library engage the "Community Memory" of Aniak. The library has books and documents-old newspapers, yearbooks and photos about Aniak-that most of the community does not know exists. There are donations that will languish because they are not digitalized and cannot be shared with the existing statewide library archive research sites. By scanning and saving the existing library archives, the library can safely share them with the community. The library can give the elders in the community the opportunity to interact with archive materials in larger than average formats, such as a 40" screen (or projected even larger.) By having trained staff available to extend the library hours, the library can function as a place where elders can come during the day to look over the library's Aniak archives and share their stories. This increase in the library's capacity encourages the community to engage in the library as a trusted space and source of information. With a desk and a scanner, the library can offer scanning service events to families who want to preserve and share their history by bringing in their photos and documents to be digitalized.

Although it is too late to undo those actions that gave away the "ownership" of much of the telling of Aniak's history, the Aniak City Library believes there is an opportunity for it to perform as a trusted steward and a trusted space for the community, and assist the community to save other existing versions of Aniak's histories.

## PROJECT WORK PLAN

In order to increase public access and build the library's capacity to offer continuous learning for families and individuals with diverse backgrounds and needs, the **Archiving Aniak: Through Our Eyes Project** will inventory and digitally archive historical documents in the Aniak library and offer community training and education events to encourage the community to access and use the archives to research their family histories. To do this the library must have equipment and be open additional hours with staff trained for library archive procedures. These events, an average of 5 per year (one every two months) will be designed to encourage cross-disciplinary and inquiry-based learning methods for people of all ages and backgrounds.

There are three basic goals for the Archiving Aniak: Through Our Eyes Project. The first goal is to make sure that all Aniak historical documents in the Aniak library are ethically archived and known to the community. (Build Capacity) The second goal is to engage the community to use the library's resources to access and save their own family history. (Promote lifelong learning) The third goal is to increase the community's use of the history archive collections and resources available in Aniak's library as well as reach out to the other library networks available throughout the state. (Increase Public Access)

The project will achieve these goals by performing the following:

- 1) **Inventorying and electronically archiving all the Aniak historical documents that exist in the Aniak Library collection.** Project staff Carrie Pete and volunteer Diana Lehman will perform an inventory of all archive material in the library and rearrange the library space to for the new equipment. They will convert existing archive materials to electronic documents, a critical first step to make the Aniak library archives readily available for the community's events to follow. Project staff Carrie Pete will be trained in the best practices for archiving Native American material.
- 2) **Open the Aniak library for additional hours.** Give diverse members of the community access to the library archives, equipment, and staff during times when required youth activities are not taking place.
- 3) **Offer presentations that will ask the community the following questions:** This is a suggested list of presentations. It is expected that the community will suggest other topics during community meetings, topics that we have not thought of, but that are of specific interest to those community members who attend.
  1. What material on the history of Aniak does the Aniak library currently have available to the community? This conversation will begin with a presentation of the census history and photo archives recently donated to the library.
  2. What are ethical protocols for Native American Archival Materials? What does the Aniak library need to do to meet them?
  3. What of your families Aniak history can you find in our library's two most recent archival donations?
  4. Would you like to see your family's history saved in Aniak (or statewide) library archives? What is the best way to do that?

5. What online resources are available to help you research your family history?
6. What do you do if you see your history being “owned” by an institution?
7. How can the Aniak library archive project work with existing Tribal and Tribal corporation archive efforts?
8. How can the Aniak Library help you to digitalize your family’s history?
9. How to use the library archive equipment.
10. What is oral an history and would you like the library to help you create one?

Schedule adjustments will be made for seasonal events, but the expectation is that there will be at least community learning event offered nearly every other month for the project duration. If the Kuskokwim River floods in May, project events may be scheduled for June *and* July. The bottom line is that the project will hold at least 10 events during the two years of the Project.

Some of the community events will lead to library documents being reviewed and printed, or documents brought in to be scanned and stored on a flash drive. The library will have flash drives available for event participants and will keep the drives on file in the library so that participants can have a device at hand to save their research. However, the devices will belong to the participants, not the library. The library will not access participant’s stored information unless authorized to do so. If the participants wish to add their histories to the library archive, appropriate permissions will be signed, and the library will save an electronic copy, giving the flash drive to the history’s owner. It will always be the participants choice to share or not to share their archives with the library.

## PROJECT OUTCOME

These are the expected outcomes and outputs.

ONE: The ethical inventory and digitalization of all the Aniak history documents owned by the Aniak library. (Success is defined as the physical completion of this and a poster created for the library listing all the documents.)

TWO: The introduction of that material to the community of Aniak with documented attendance via a sign-in sheet. (Success is defined by attendance of 2-5% of adult population.)

THREE: Community attendance to the community events/deliverables that the Aniak library will offer over the course of the program, documented by sign-in sheets. (Success is defined by attendance of 2-5% of adult population.)

FOUR: Individual history research and archive projects conducted in the library with the assistance of library staff and equipment. Documented by a list of the those who received/stored flash drives at the library over the life of the projects. (Success is defined by 5 different Aniak histories researched and saved electronically at projects end.)

FIVE: New histories added to the Aniak library's archive and shared with at least two other archive collections. (Success defined by 2-5% of outcome #4 ethically shared with the library.)

SIX: The project challenges and results will be shared with the participation in the community of practice.

The benefits will be sustained by the public posting of the Aniak History Archive list on the City of Aniak & the Aniak Public Library website, and with other regional libraries.

The community will be the aware of the issues surrounding the collection and archiving of history, especially Aniak's Native American history; be aware of the history that resides in the Aniak library; be aware of the history that resides in other libraries; and be aware of the importance of saving (and how to save) their family and community history/memory.

## **Schedule of Completion**

### **Schedule of Completion for each year of project**

A subsistence lifestyle is a very important part of life in Aniak. Events need to be scheduled around the opening of salmon fishing, moose hunting season, berry picking and the freezing and break-up of the Kuskokwim River. There are also annual state and local Tribal events to consider. With those considerations in mind, it is anticipated that the schedule of completion will look like this:

The first community event will be held in late January, specifically to introduce the community to the project and the archival resources at the library and discuss how the community would like to schedule the bi-monthly events.

2020: Five Community events/deliverables: January March May/June/July September October

1. Introducing the Community to the Aniak Library Archives.
2. What are ethical protocols for Native American Archival Materials? What does the Aniak library need to do to meet them?
3. What of your families Aniak history can you find in our library's two most recent archival donations?
4. How can the Aniak Library help you to digitalize your family's history?
5. What online resources are available to help you research your family history?

2021: Five Community events/deliverables: November January March May/June/July August

6. How can the Aniak library archive project work with existing Tribal and Tribal corporation archive efforts?
7. What do you do if your history is "owned" by an institution without permission?
8. What is oral an history and would you like the library to help you create one?
9. What is a family history project that you would like to work with your children on?
10. What community archive projects would like to see the Aniak library continue to offer after this grant project ends?