Typhoon Merbok Strategic Implementation Plan

Purpose

The Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development (Department) seeks an extension to June 30, 2026 to complete a Typhoon Merbok (Merbok) Unmet Needs Assessment (UNA) and Action Recovery Plan (ARP) for our Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery award. Extension justifications include the following.

- The 55 Merbok Most Impacted and Distressed (MID) communities are unconnected from Alaska's road system and accessible only by plane or boat. Travel to these communities is often hazardous or impossible during weather events and freeze up and break up (times when ice is accumulating or breaking up).
- Lodging accommodations for visitors in most MID communities are non-existent. Lodging capacity in the regional hub and MID communities of Bethel and Nome is limited, requiring the number of visitors to these locations to be small.
- Conducting our UNA in a safe and culturally appropriate manner will require us to meet MID community members during the winter months to avoid conflicts with their key cultural activities and hazardous ice and weather conditions. This approach will also ensure maximum participation among MID communities.

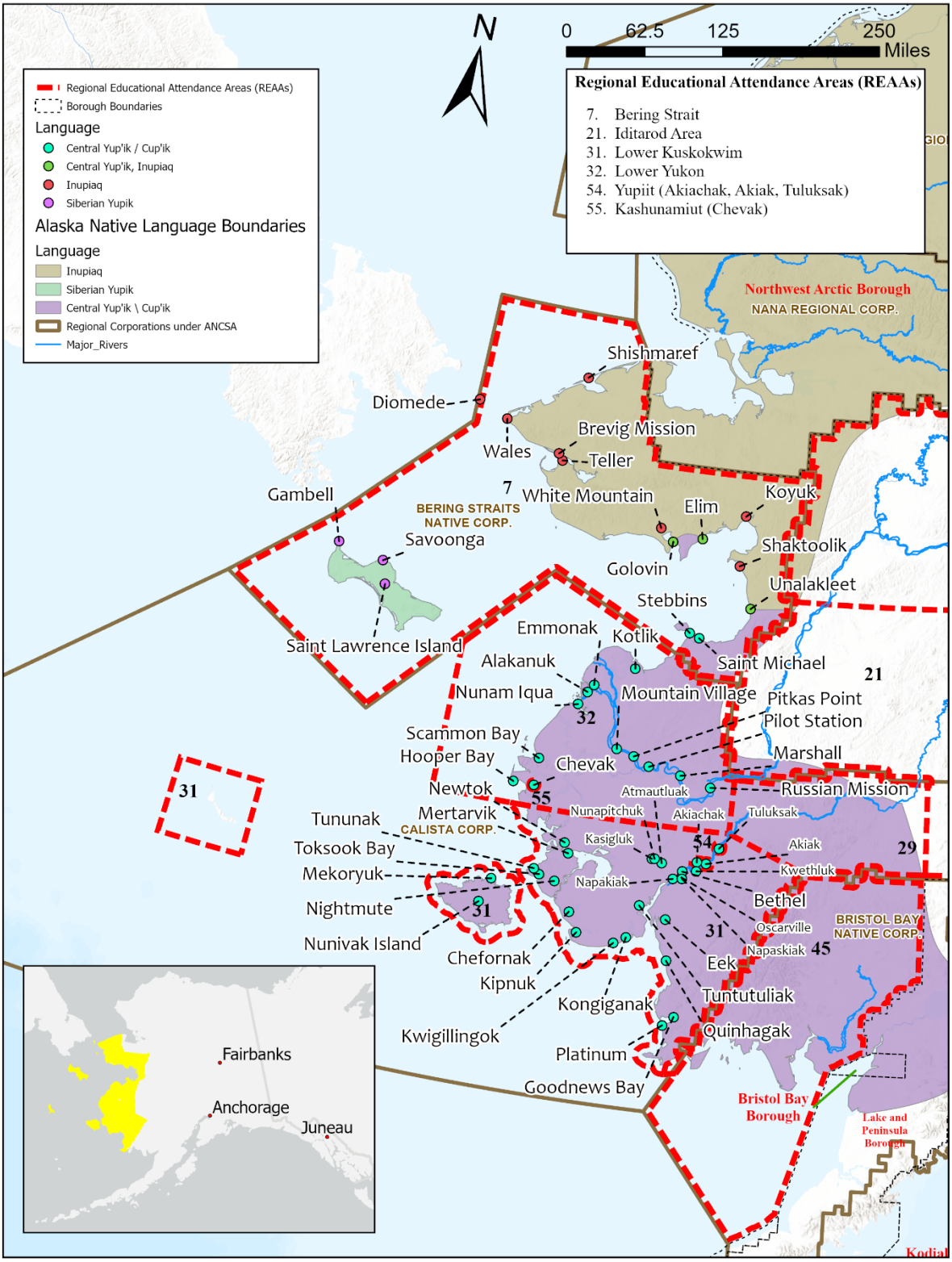
These logistical, environmental, and cultural complexities will require additional resources and time to deliver an accurate, meaningful, and defensible UNA and ARP.

Background

Merbok impacted approximately 1300 miles of Alaska's western coast on Saturday, September 17, 2022; a coastline larger than California and Oregon combined. MID communities in this region are remote, rural, and unattached from Alaska's road system. Figure 1 is a map identifying the Merbok Impact Area (MIA) and MID communities. The MIA is largely home to Yupik and Inupiaq Peoples. Most MID community members identified in the blue boundary largely identify as Yup'ik speaking peoples. Most MID community members identified in the green boundary largely identify as Inupiaq speaking peoples. MID communities identified within the yellow boundary include both Yupik and Inupiaq speaking peoples. Seeking the services of Yup'ik and Inupiaq interpreters will be critical when engaging with MID community members to identify their unmet needs linked to and exacerbated by the Merbok disaster.

Indigenous Yup'ik and Inupiaq Peoples share interconnected relationships with the lands and animals in their areas. Practicing their ways of life depend on understanding weather patterns; ice; bird, mammal, and fish migrations; and hunting, fishing, whaling, and food processing activities. These understandings are the product of observations, experiences, and elder's teachings. Special care will need to be taken to align meetings with MID community members

Figure 1. Merbok Impact Area and MID Communities



to avoid interfering with their key cultural activities and celebrations. Yup'ik and Inupiaq cultures practice food and resource gathering activities year-round. Timeframes for key Yup'ik cultural activities include fishing between June and August, berry picking in August and September, moose hunting in September, and marine mammal hunting between April and June. Key Inupiaq cultural activities include fishing between June and August, berry picking in July and August, land mammal hunting in September and October, and marine mammal hunting and whaling between April and June.

Objectives

Typhoon Merbok Implementation Strategy objectives include:

1) Identify available and deployed funding to mitigate unmet needs linked to or exacerbated by Merbok in MID communities by December 2025.
2) Conduct unmet needs survey in MID communities by June 2025.
3) Coordinate three regional meetings (Meetings) among MID communities to identify unmet needs by December 2025.
4) Facilitate three regional meetings (Meetings) among MID communities to identify unmet needs by March 2025.
5) Analyze survey and regional meeting unmet needs data by September 2025.
6) Submit Typhoon Merbok Action Recovery Plan by June 2026.

Methods

We organize and present our Merbok Strategic Implementation Plan below by objectives. The Merbok Strategic Implementation Team (Team) includes a Grants Administration Manager (Manager), a Grant Administrator 3 (Administrator), four Local Government Specialists (Specialist), a Publications Specialist (Publisher), a Research Analyst 4 (Data Analyst), a Research Analyst 3 (Linguist), a Program Coordinator 1 (Coordinator) and a Consultant (Contractor). Table 1 is a project timeline charting key objective activity milestone completion dates. Objectives appear in orange blocks and activities in green blocks. We use shaded boxes to indicate months when each objective activity milestone will be completed. All objective activity milestone completion dates are defined as the last day in the month referenced.

1. Identify Funding

The Administrator will draft, finalize, and work with procurement to advertise a Request for Proposals (RFP) for 60 days by August 2024 (Appendix A). The successful applicant will identify deployed and available federal funding to mitigate unmet needs; develop and conduct an unmet needs survey; facilitate and transcribe three Meetings; analyze MID communities' unmet needs data collected from surveys and Meetings; and draft an ARP. The Administrator will work with procurement to negotiate and execute the contract by November 2024 (Appendix A).

The Contractor and Manager will connect with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Housing and Urban Development, and other federal agencies to

identify available and deployed funds to mitigate needs linked to or exacerbated by Merbok in MID communities. Communications between the Contractor, Manager, and federal agencies will occur between November 2024 and November 2025 to compile and track Merbok funding. The Contractor will create two tables by December 2025 (Appendix A). The first table will identify available federal funding sources to mitigate unmet needs. This table will include funding titles, amounts, periods of performance, eligible applicants, and allowable costs. A second table will identify deployed federal funds addressing needs linked to Merbok in MID communities. This table will include funding titles, amounts, periods of performance, applicants, and scopes. Available and deployed funding tables will be included in the ARP. These tables will improve understandings of current projects and available funding sources, prevent duplication of efforts, and inform decision making processes to address remaining unmet needs.

2. Conducting Unmet Needs Survey

The Contractor will develop a community based unmet needs survey (Survey) by December 2024 (Appendix A). This tool will aim to collect MID community members' unmet needs linked to or exacerbated by Merbok. The Contractor and Manager will work together to review and finalize the Survey January 2025 (Appendix A). The Contractor will strive to deploy a stratified sampling survey design method to produce a broader understanding of MID communities' unmet needs across population cohorts. The Contractor will conduct Surveys in MID communities between February and June 2025 (Appendix A). The Coordinator will file Survey responses on a secure internal hard drive.

3. Coordinating Regional Meetings

Two regional meetings (Meeting) will be held in Bethel and one in Nome to identify and discuss unmet needs in MID communities. Participation will be voluntary. Each MID community, the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), AVCP Regional Housing Authority, Kawerak, and the Bering Straits Regional Housing Authority will have the opportunity to appoint and send one representative to a Meeting. Representatives from MID communities and regional non-profit organizations sharing cultural connections will be grouped together to participate in one of the three Meetings.

The Coordinator, Linguist, and Publisher will collaborate to develop an Information Release Request (IRR) and outreach materials explaining Meeting purposes and participation opportunities available to MID communities by October 2024 (Appendix A). The IRR will request participants approval to have the community they represent and their information recorded during Meetings. Outreach materials will present the purpose of the Merbok CDBG-DR grant, opportunities to participate, and who to contact for further information. Specialists will distribute outreach materials and an IRR to MID cities, tribes, and the above regional non-profit organizations in November 2024 requesting a response in 30 days (Appendix). Outreach materials and communications with MID cities and tribes will request that these entities work

together to decide whether to participate and appoint one individual to represent their community. Specialists will receive and send to the Coordinator MID communities' and regional non-profit organizations' responses and IRRs and a list of confirmed participants for each Meeting location. The Coordinator will purchase and coordinate airfare, lodging, and per diem for all Meeting participants, including Team support staff by December 2024 (Appendix A). Meetings will occur between January and March 2025. Primary and contingency dates will be chosen for each Meeting to plan for the high possibility that inclement weather could result in cancellations.

The Administrator will negotiate and execute Memorandums of Agreement with AVCP and Kawerak to secure meeting facilities and IT and translation services for two Bethel Meetings and one Nome Meeting by December 2024 (Appendix A).

4. Facilitating Regional Meetings

The Contractor will develop a Meeting agenda in December 2024 seeking to address the following three initiatives (Appendix A).

1) Present an overview of the Typhoon Merbok CDGB-DR award, purposes, and allowable costs.
2) Identify and discuss MID communities' unmet needs.
3) Learn MID communities' perceptions on how project awards should be determined.

Specialists will distribute the Meeting agenda to Meeting participants and MID cities and tribes by January 2025 (Appendix A). The Contractor will reach out to and collaborate with AVCP and Kawerak in January 2025 to learn how best to facilitate meetings in their areas (Appendix A). The Contractor will apply their discoveries to develop and execute a culturally appropriate approach to facilitate Meetings that encourages dialogue among all Meeting participants and seeks to document MID communities shared and unique unmet needs.

The Contractor will facilitate Meetings between January and March 2025 (Appendix A). Meetings will be recorded and transcribed. Each Meeting participant will have their own microphone linked to the recording system. This will ensure each Meeting participant's speech and the MID community they represent is distinguishable in the transcription. Meeting transcriptions will include only the MID community each participant represents and not their personally identifiable information. The Contractor will transcribe all Meeting recordings by May 2025 (Appendix A).

5. Analyzing Unmet Needs Data

The Contractor will develop methods and an analytical framework to gather and analyze MID community participants' unmet needs data, including their perceptions on how project awards should be determined by January 2025 (Appendix A). Methods and the analytical framework should describe processes for analyzing Survey results and Meeting transcription data. The Contractor will analyze Survey and Meeting transcript data by September 2025 (Appendix A). A

list will be created for each MID community identifying their specific unmet needs. A separate list will be created identifying unmet needs expressed by all MID communities. Unmet need types will be identified from the master list of all MID communities' unmet needs. Unmet need types could include unmet needs related to housing, infrastructure, waste, utilities, cultural facilities (e.g. fish camps), etc. The Contractor will present monthly progress updates to the Administrator and Manager via Teams on the analysis.

6. Submitting Typhoon Merbok Action Recovery Plan

The Contractor will share unmet needs analysis results with the Data Analyst demonstrating the unmet need types experienced in each MID community by September 2025 (Appendix A). The Data Analyst will produce and provide 3 maps to the Contractor by October 2025 (Appendix A). One map will identify the Merbok Impact Area (MIA) and MID communities grouped by Yup'ik and Inupiaq language boundaries. A second map will delineate MID communities represented by Meeting participants grouped by Meeting location. A third map will illustrate and connect unmet need types to MID communities. These maps will illustrate the MID area and improve communication of findings.

The Contractor will develop and provide a draft ARP to the Administrator, Manager, Capital Access (Consultant), AVCP, and Kawerak for review by December 2025 (Appendix A). This draft will include all HUD required ARP elements, including unmet needs assessment findings and the above referenced maps. Meeting participants' perceptions on how awards should be determined will also be discussed. Appendices will be provided including lists of each MID community's unmet needs observed during Meetings and analysis. The Contractor will organize, present, and discuss MID communities' unmet needs by unmet need type. Citations to appendices listing MID communities' unmet needs will connect findings to discussions on each specific unmet need type. The Data Analyst's third map will be presented in the ARP unmet needs assessment section to illustrate findings organized by unmet need types. The ARP draft will also include funding recommendations substantiated and informed by unmet needs assessment findings, including Meeting Participants' perceptions on how funds should be determined.

The Administrator, Manager, Consultant, AVCP, and Kawerak will review the ARP by January 2025 (Appendix A). The Manager will finalize and submit the draft ARP to HUD for review by February 2025 (Appendix A). HUD will review and return the draft ARP to the Manager by April 2025 (Appendix A). The Manager will revise, finalize, and return the final ARP to HUD for approval by June 2026 (Appendix A).

Outcomes

Anticipated outcomes include the documentation of MID communities' unmet needs due to or exacerbated by Typhoon Merbok. We also expect to present recommendations to address some current unmet needs and mitigate potential risks associated with future related disasters.

Appendix A. Project Timeline

Objectives/Activities	2024						2025												2026					
	Jul.	Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
Identify available and deployed funding																								
Draft, finalize, and advertise RFP																								
Execute contract																								
Create tables identifying available and deployed funds																								
Conduct unmet needs survey in MID communities																								
Develop Survey																								
Review and finalize Survey																								
Conduct Survey																								
Coordinate regional meetings among MID communities																								
Develop IRR and outreach materials																								
Distribute outreach materials and IRRs to MID communities																								
Coordinate Meeting Participants' travel																								
Execute MOAs to secure Meeting facilities and services																								
Facilitate regional meetings among MID communities																								
Develop Meeting agenda																								
Distribute Meeting agenda																								
Identify best facilitation practices																								
Facilitate Meetings																								
Transcribe Meeting recordings																								
Analyze survey and regional meeting unmet needs data																								
Develop methods and analytical framework																								
Analyze Survey and Meeting transcript data																								
Submit Typhoon Merbok Action Recovery Plan																								
Send unmet needs analysis results																								
Produce and provide maps																								
Develop draft ARP																								
Review draft ARP																								
Finalize and submit ARP to HUD for review																								
HUD ARP review																								
Revise, finalize, and return ARP to HUD for final approval																								