



Project Unangam Ulaa

Project Update April 2020

APIA & NSF





Award #1928254



Detail from "Natives of Oonalashka and their Habitations" Webber 1778

Oral tradition says the Unangax people have lived in the Aleutian Islands since the beginning of time. Unangax created dwellings – Unangam Ulaa – from locally available resources (driftwood, whale ribs, grass, and dirt) that provided shelter and spiritual comfort for eons.

Key Project Contacts:

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*APIA is an Alaska Native non-profit organization formed pursuant to the Federal Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971							

Project Website URLs & Social Media Accounts:

<https://www.apiai.org/departments/cultural-heritage-department/culture-history/>

<https://www.facebook.com/APIAI/>

https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1928254&HistoricalAwards=false

Project Objectives: Briefly explain the overall goals of the project, specific aims, methods, and broader impact activities.

The hypothesis being tested in this project is whether ancient construction techniques of the Unangam Ulaa can be applied to modern materials to build energy efficient dwellings. We are in the two-year planning phase for the five-year field research. Our methods focus on interviewing elders and reviewing literature for strong cultural-based foundation; see outcomes below.

Keywords: Unangam Ulaa, Aleut Barbara, Traditional Sod House, Aleut, Aleutian, Pribilof, Unanga

Progress to Date/Future Plans: Provide a brief research update describing progress to date or future plans.

For the two-year planning phrase, we have assembled a team of Unanga/Aleut people, engineers, archaeologists, architects, and social scientists to form a strong cultural appreciation of the traditional dwelling and the surrounding spirituality. In Nov 2019, we all met, and everyone introduced themselves, talking about or “superpowers.” We hired research assistant Vincent Tomalonis in Feb 2020. We presented a preliminary report at the Alaska Anthropological Association annual conference in Fairbanks in Feb 2020. Dr. Doug Veltre gave an awesome presentation of the archaeological history of the Unangam Ulaa in Feb 2020. We are working on our elder questionnaire, our community SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunity, and threats) surveys. We are rough drafting our preliminary report to submit for publication. We are working on a rough draft of a web site and pushing ourselves to learn 3D animation (Blender 2.82a). We hope to soon interview elders and plan for field research. We are working on five papers (linguistic, archival, anthropological, construction, social science).

Highlights or Expected Outcomes: Provide a brief overview of any noteworthy deliverables or expected outcomes related to research or broader impacts.

If we can design and build an energy-efficient dwelling based upon a design from the Aleutians that is thousands of years old, these designs may be replicated in other regions to stave the decimation of Arctic villages with eons of cultural knowledge.

NNA Community Collaboration and Research Coordination: What would you like to get from the NNA Community? Is there anything you would like to offer? Is your project working in any specific communities or geographic areas? When will you be there? What kind of resource sharing or project coordination opportunities would you like to explore?

We would like to know more about the other projects, research questions, goals, challenges, how challenges overcome.

Advice for Overcoming NNA Project Challenges: Are there any unique challenges that your project has had to overcome or is facing now? Are there any lessons learned or things you would suggest others do/do differently? Advice Stay optimistic. Consult with optimistic people. (We really did not expect to win the award.) Don't pin yourself into the box. Don't say, “We will do A.” Instead, say, “We will do A, but we also have Plan B and Plan C. Oh, and we also have Plan D and E.” Challenges In Nov 2019, a plane crashed in Unalaska (first commercial plane fatality in US in ten years), stymying travel to our villages. In Mar 2020, COVID-19 struck, thwarting travel and causing concern for Unanga elders.