



2026 Policy Brief

Closing Meeting
April 13-17, 2026

Editors: Dr. Elizabeth Lynne Rink and Dr. Lill Rastad Bjørst

About the Fulbright Arctic Initiative

The Fulbright Arctic Initiative (FAI) supported a network of twenty professionals, practitioners and researchers from the United States, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark including Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden whose individual and collaborative work from 2024 to 2026 addresses key research questions related to creating a secure and sustainable Arctic. FAI's fourth cohort (FAI IV) of scholars carried out three in-person meetings, thematic group work, and individual Fulbright exchanges.

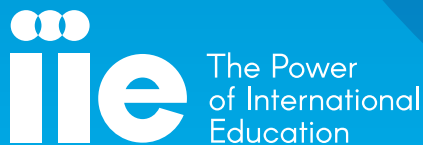
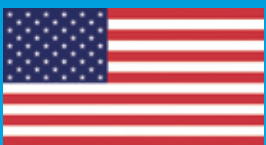
The Fulbright Arctic scholars stimulate international research collaboration on Arctic issues while developing multilateral and circumpolar networks within Arctic countries. FAI uses a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to address complex themes relevant to shared challenges and opportunities in the Arctic.

FAI IV includes academic researchers in the physical, natural, social, and health sciences, Indigenous and local knowledge holders, as well as practitioners working in various fields and sectors with applications to the Arctic. Co-Lead Scholars provide intellectual leadership, mentor and connect participants to other international experts, and facilitate discussion and collaboration within the group.

The recommendations presented here aim to advance the collective contributions that the previous cohorts of FAI scholars have made over the past decade and to further broader discussions about the future of the region, its resources, and its communities.

The FAI is a component of the Fulbright Scholar Program, which is sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the U.S. Department of State. Additional funding throughout the four cohorts of FAI has been provided by the governments of Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and the Kingdom of Denmark. Academic and other institutions, corporations, and foundations in the United States and partner countries also provide direct and indirect support to FAI. The Institute of International Education administers the Fulbright Scholar Program, including FAI, on behalf of ECA.

The recommendations presented in this brief are the product of the program participants' individual and collective inquiries. Any assertions, opinions, or findings may be attributed to individual scholars or to the group but do not represent any official policy or viewpoint of the Fulbright Program; of its main sponsor, the United States Department of State; or of any government, institution, or affiliation to which the FAI scholars may be associated.



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Full Circle in the Arctic

THE FULBRIGHT ARCTIC INITIATIVE'S FOURTH COHORT CULMINATES IN ALASKA

The occasion of the closing meeting of the fourth iteration of the Fulbright Arctic Initiative (FAI IV) will mark the program's 10-year anniversary. To continue the Fulbright Arctic Initiative's commitment to multilateral collaboration and science diplomacy, it is most relevant to conclude FAI IV's scholarship in Arctic sciences and policy development in Alaska to learn from and with the Arctic communities and peoples who have been foundational to the decade of growth and expansion of the Fulbright Arctic Initiative.

As the co-lead scholars of FAI IV, we bridge Arctic research environments and disciplines across North America and Europe and have experienced this program as a strong platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration in a time of change.

FAI IV is a strong network of professionals, practitioners, and researchers from the United States, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark including Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. These leaders in their fields have challenged and supported each other with the ambition to grow and think together. To inform and develop recommendations, their interdisciplinary thematic groups have facilitated listening sessions and engaged community members, professionals from the public and private sectors, and rights holders. As a group, they visited centers of governance in Sápmi (in northern Norway) and Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and individually they carried out exchanges to university centers and institutions in the Arctic nations. Teachings from elders, youth, civil society, government, practitioners, and Indigenous groups and rights holders have informed their individual and collaborative research and further enhanced their genuine appreciation of cultures and life in the Arctic.

During their time in Alaska, the FAI IV scholars will present the findings laid out in this publication; their recommendations emerge both from their individual research projects as well as from their thematic group discussions. They will meet with Arctic academics and practitioners, learn from panels convened by the Arctic Encounter Summit, and engage in science diplomacy. As the largest annual Arctic policy and business gathering in the United States, the summit stands out as the perfect venue for presenting their outcomes with Arctic policymakers and other audiences.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing group has done groundbreaking work in alliance with Arctic youth and pinpointed how officials fail to notice the dedicated frontline work of young people themselves in their communities, schools, community centers, and online



FULBRIGHT ARCTIC CO-LEAD SCHOLARS

We have been privileged to work with the Fulbright Arctic Scholars and have seen the creation of new and lasting partnerships that cross borders to help advance a more sustainable future for Arctic peoples and the global environment. We hope the recommendations presented here are useful to Arctic communities, policy makers, and researchers in setting priorities for future work and for making policy decisions.

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The 18-month program began with an in-person meeting in Norway (right), included a mid-term meeting in Greenland (left), and concludes in Anchorage, Alaska.

spaces. With that learning, the group recommends, among other things, sustained investment in youth-centered programs that support mental health and wellbeing.

The Arctic Resources group draws our attention to the growing demand for critical minerals from the Arctic. Informed by their scholarship and listening sessions across the region, their recommendations are two-fold. First, they recommend the early prioritizing of community engagement, the upholding of rights, and the development of entry and exit plans with the local community. Second, they show the importance of applying Arctic-relevant sustainability reporting standards, integrating expertise on the local impacts of environmental changes, and aligning business models with community time horizons.

The Security and Governance group has explored how the concept of 'critical infrastructure' has different meanings depending on who defines it. They have been in dialogue with Arctic stakeholders and rights holders to create a checklist pertaining to critical infrastructure development. They highlight the importance of ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are always considered and that infrastructure planning involves broader collaboration and shared understandings. Their checklist underscores how pivotal it is that decision makers understand how Indigenous and local communities view infrastructure before planning a project.

▶ This Policy Brief reports on the research findings and selected policy recommendations from the fourth round of Fulbright Arctic Initiative scholars.

Through co-leading FAI IV, we are honored to have both witnessed and encouraged the fourth cohort of FAI scholars' individual expertise and collaborative projects. Along the way they have practiced friendship, leadership, curiosity, and professionalism in navigating science diplomacy through the Arctic's dynamic policy landscape. They have put forth policy recommendations that promote Arctic security, innovative and sustainable Arctic resources, and health and wellbeing among Arctic communities. They have seized the opportunity to learn while being open and generous in sharing their expertise with each other and with various audiences throughout their 18 months as a cohort. We look forward to seeing where they take their learnings next and welcome them to the ever-growing network of FAI alumni.

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YOUTH-CENTERED INVESTMENTS FOR THRIVING ARCTIC COMMUNITIES

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This brief has undergone editorial revision to align grammar, style, and terminology with federal standards; revisions were made independently of the authors.

Engaged youth across the Circumpolar North understand the interconnected social, environmental, and political forces shaping their mental health and wellbeing. Their knowledge and leadership are essential resources for Arctic communities to thrive. Governments must recognize young people as partners in mental health promotion and policymaking and actively seek out ways to include them in the decision-making process. Formal youth representation and long-term funding for youth-centered wellbeing initiatives are the policy levers Arctic communities need now more than ever.

Youth as Knowledge Holders

The mental health and wellbeing of youth (defined here as 15 to 30-year-olds) are key to a prosperous Arctic. From Alaska through Inuit Nunaat to Sápmi, young people face high rates of mental health challenges like psychological distress, suicide, and limited access to health care and services. The rates for Indigenous youth and communities are even higher. At the same time, these young people possess the knowledge, skills, and tenacity needed to tackle the complex drivers of these issues and advance change in their communities.

Arctic youth are acutely aware of the dynamics affecting their wellbeing, including a changing environment, intergenerational trauma, lack of equal access to resources, housing shortages, and the influence of digital environments on identity and belonging. There are also limited opportunities for youth to formally and meaningfully participate (with structural support and compensation) in governance and other decision-making processes.

Youth and Community Successes

Policymakers often pledge to address the alarming statistics related to Arctic youth mental health and wellbeing yet still wonder, "Where are the youth?" Many of these officials fail to notice the dedicated frontline work of young people in their communities in schools, community centers, online spaces, Tribal organizations, and beyond. This oversight signals a clear disconnect between youth perspectives and the policy processes that shape their wellbeing.



Artwork by Grace Tookoome

In contrast, policies and programs co-designed with youth and community organizations tend to be more relevant, trusted, and effective over time, as they reflect their priorities, experiences, and values and knowledge systems. Protective factors like connections to nature, family, community, and culture promote resilience and positive health outcomes among Arctic youth. Together, these findings underscore the foundational roles of community, culture, and the everyday spaces youth inhabit in shaping their mental health and wellbeing.



A scene from Norway.
Photo credit: Mia Bennett

Supporting and Scaling Effective Approaches

Despite strong evidence of effectiveness, the programs that best support Arctic youth are rarely funded or implemented at the scale necessary for long-term impact. Communities have long relied on land-based, cultural, and intergenerational practices to promote youth wellbeing, and young people consistently affirm that these approaches are successful when they are stable, locally governed, and adequately resourced.

Most youth-serving programs continue to depend on short-term, project-based funding cycles that undermine continuity, erode trust, and constrain long-term planning. Evaluation frameworks, meanwhile, often fail to incorporate Indigenous and local knowledge systems or community-defined indicators of success. These conditions create a persistent gap between what communities know works and what existing funding systems enable.

Youth described complex grant requirements, short application timelines, and limited administrative capacity as major barriers to accessing resources. Youth participation in policy and program design is too often limited to uncompensated consultation rather than shared decision-making, reinforcing power imbalances and constraining the potential of youth leadership. They call for streamlined funding pathways, multi-year commitments,

▶ "We have all the necessary people [and] expertise to make the Arctic what we talk about when we are discussing our ideal outcomes... People who live and work in the North have what it takes to be successful. We [youth] have what it takes."

— AN ARCTIC YOUTH

and direct investment in youth-led organizations to ensure that resources reach those doing the work on the ground.

Investing in youth-centered programs that support mental health and wellbeing is therefore not only a cultural or social priority but a strategic public health intervention. Such investments reduce downstream costs associated with emergency response, crisis care, and youth disengagement from education, employment, and community life. They also strengthen trust between communities and public institutions, creating the conditions necessary for more effective, fair, and sustainable policy implementation across the Circumpolar North.



Youth-Centered Policy Recommendations

Provide long-term, flexible funding to community-based programs for youth

Create long-term, flexible funding schemes for community-based entities to deliver results-driven, hyperlocal, youth-centered wellbeing programs with streamlined administration processes

Promote Indigenous and local knowledge in policies and programs

Meaningfully engage and promote the role of Indigenous and local knowledge systems in the design and evaluation of policies and programs for youth mental health and wellbeing

Formalize the role of youth in decision and policy making processes

Shift from consulting youth to embedding them in policy making processes and through partnerships across agencies and youth-serving organizations in communities

In developing these policy and action recommendations, we drew from a broad interdisciplinary literature base and conducted five listening sessions with youth and key stakeholders across the Arctic, including policymakers, public officials, community-based public health practitioners (with a focus on youth and mental health), academic researchers, and an Inuk Elder advisor. These distinct and varied perspectives highlight both the urgency of action and the need for policy frameworks that meaningfully incorporate youth leadership and community expertise.

Across the Circumpolar North, hyperlocal innovation continues to demonstrate that community-based approaches to youth mental health and wellbeing are effective, culturally grounded, and responsive to local priorities. Yet without stable, multi-year funding and clearly defined roles for youth within governance and decision-making structures, these initiatives remain vulnerable to disruption and misalignment with the evolving needs of young people. The absence of structural support limits the scalability, sustainability, and long-term impact of programs that communities consistently identify as successful.

To address these gaps, policymakers must strengthen and formalize relationships with community-based organizations that serve and collaborate with youth. This includes establishing direct channels between these organizations and political and fiscal decision-makers, ensuring that policies reflect youth and



Mural as spotted in Nuuk, Greenland, in June 2025.

Photo credit: Sappho Z. Gilbert

▶ The absence of structural support limits the scalability, sustainability, and long-term impact of programs that communities consistently identify as successful.

community priorities, and embedding Indigenous and local knowledge systems into program design, implementation, and evaluation. Long-term, flexible funding is essential to support locally-led solutions, maintain continuity in staffing and services, and preserve institutional knowledge.

Sustained progress in the mental health and wellbeing of Arctic youth depends on aligning funding structures, governance processes, and policy frameworks with the leadership, expertise, and demonstrated impact of communities and their young people. By grounding policy in youth-identified priorities and community-defined measures of success, governments can strengthen resilience, reduce downstream costs, and ensure that Arctic youth have the resources and opportunities necessary to thrive.



THE FULL PERSPECTIVE ON CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST (FULL POCI)

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This brief has undergone editorial revision to align grammar, style, and terminology with federal standards; revisions were made independently of the authors.

The Arctic has long suffered from a dearth of infrastructure that supports both daily life and overall security. The shifting security situation has made infrastructure a critical priority. This brief explores differing concepts of critical infrastructure, highlights different definitions of use, and explains the challenges these differences create. Both "critical" and "infrastructure" are contested terms, and definitions are shaped by culturally and geographically specific needs and interests.

The central recommendation of this policy brief is the adoption and routine use of the Full Perspective on Critical Infrastructure Checklist (Full POCI) in all future Arctic infrastructure planning and investment processes. The POCI provides a practical, repeatable tool that helps agencies, partners, and decision-makers identify and reconcile differing understandings of "critical infrastructure" across state, military, municipal, local, and Indigenous perspectives. Applying this checklist early and consistently allows planners to surface conceptual gaps, reduce friction, engage collaboratively, and ensure that infrastructure development reflects the full range of community, security, and sovereignty needs in the region.

Critical infrastructure can no longer be defined solely by state perspectives. Understanding different perspectives is foundational to building and maintaining effective Arctic infrastructure.

▶ The POCI provides a practical, repeatable tool that helps agencies, partners, and decision-makers identify and reconcile differing understandings of "critical infrastructure" across state, military, municipal, local, and Indigenous perspectives.



A scene from Norway.
Photo credit: Cecilia Kocinski-Mulder

Key Takeaways

Critical infrastructure has different meanings depending on who defines it.

Indigenous communities, municipalities, states, and industries all view infrastructure differently based on their priorities. These differing definitions can create confusion and conflict during infrastructure planning and investment.

Indigenous perspectives must be considered.

For many Arctic Indigenous Peoples, infrastructure goes beyond built infrastructure, to include sacred sites, knowledge systems, subsistence lands, and cultural practices that sustain their way of life. These priorities can come into conflict with state-definitions and cannot be ignored.

Infrastructure planning must involve broader collaboration and shared understanding.

Decision-makers must consult communities, understand existing infrastructure, and widen their definitions before starting projects. Effective planning requires cross-sector communication, inclusive participation, and alignment of varied priorities.



SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE RECOMMENDATIONS



Sisimiut, Greenland

Photo credit: Cecilia Kocinski-Mulder



Alta Museum petroglyphs

Photo credit: Cecilia Kocinski-Mulder

Perspectives

Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous critical infrastructure sustains Indigenous lifeways, food security, cultural practices, and reciprocal relationships with the environment. They are grounded in self-determination, governance, participating in decision making, respect for Indigenous Knowledges, and the wellbeing of the community and natural world. These infrastructures are frequently framed as under threat from states, changes in the environment, and industrial development.

This form of critical infrastructure and consideration includes:

- Cultural infrastructure, including places and systems that support Indigenous communities, language, and heritage
- Marine and land use for food security
- Natural solutions to environmental impacts on infrastructure
- Community-led adaptation, namely local knowledge as a driver of infrastructure design and resilience.
- Protection of sacred sites and subsistence infrastructure from industrial encroachment.
- Co-production of knowledge and Indigenous-led planning.

Local and Municipal Perspectives

Critical infrastructure supports daily life, safety, and subsistence practices. It includes built infrastructure such as roads, housing, and water systems as well as soft infrastructure like knowledge, culture, and social networks. Municipalities often discuss these in terms of investment, policy, and development.

This form of critical infrastructure and consideration includes:

- Housing
- Telecommunications
- Water waste and waste systems
- Transportation
- Community infrastructure and community-based energy systems
- Industrial development
- Environmental adaptations

State Perspectives

Critical infrastructure supports national security and defense, economic development, growing populations, and climate resilience in Arctic cities. States often discuss these in terms of multi-use or dual-use infrastructure. States think in terms of national security, military, diplomacy, and economic development.

This form of infrastructure and consideration includes:

- Deepwater ports and transport corridors for defense and commerce
- Energy infrastructure connecting Arctic resources to global markets
- Emergency and disaster resilience
- Engineering innovation such as adaptive designs for permafrost, snow, and remote conditions
- Data integration that connects databases and research centers across borders
- Search and Rescue facilities
- Pan-Arctic and regional collaboration

Industry Perspectives

Critical infrastructure is needed to operate a profitable business. Infrastructure differs from country to country and includes administration, access to workforce, capital expenditure, and built infrastructure. The business community often discusses this in terms of cost, strategic needs, reliance, and redundancy. Some businesses focus on their responsibility in terms of providing essential services, others focus on profit maximizing, often searching for investment or passing on costs.

This form of critical infrastructure and consideration includes:

- Energy Systems both local and for export
- Extractive Infrastructure
- Transport and Logistics
- Utilities
- Telecommunications
- Labor
- Materials



The Challenges

Variance and complexity in the terminology used to describe infrastructure by the different stakeholders in the region has historically derailed decision-making and progress. The history of Arctic infrastructure development has been tied to colonization and resource extraction, which have been justified in terms of national security. In some regions, industrial projects have reduced access to subsistence lands and resources. Other projects have led to environmental degradation and have lacked post-construction maintenance. Cultural and environmental impacts are often under-assessed.

The absence of Indigenous and local involvement in decision-making has resulted in infrastructure being built where it was not wanted or needed, while urgent community needs went unmet. There have been cases where the meaning of multi-use infrastructure has also been contested. Further, state policies may overlook and undervalue infrastructure that communities consider vital, such as seasonal access routes, reindeer herding lands, and cultural infrastructure such as community centers and museums.

➡ The absence of Indigenous and local involvement in decision-making has resulted in infrastructure being built where it was not wanted or needed, while urgent community needs went unmet.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening sessions were held in the following topics/locations and included the following participants:

- **North America/Russia:** scholars and community members from the U.S., Canada, and individuals from Russia now living abroad

- **Attendees at the "Research Coordination Network (RCN):**

Co-creating Research for Just Arctic Future Infrastructure Transformations, Resilience, and Adaptation (CRAFT)" session at Arctic Science Summit Week 2025 in Boulder, Colorado. led by Dr. Vera Kuklina and supported by International Congress on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP) and discussion leads Drs. Howard Epstein, Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyag, and Heather Sauyag Jean Gordon.

Kuklina, V., Ali, S., Bradley, H., Epstein, H., Fritz, S., Gantulga, U., Gordon, H. S. J., Itchuaqiyag, C. U., Khaziakhmetova, D., Li, W., Miles, V., Orttung, R., Peirce, J., Pellegrino, V., Petrov, A., Povoroznyuk, O., Schweitzer, P., Temte, J., Weston, B., Young, J., & Yu, X. (Forthcoming, 2026). *Report from all infrastructure NSF RCN listening sessions: Research priorities on infrastructure futures from community perspectives*. National Science Foundation Research Coordination Network.

- **Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland):** leaders of businesses in Greenland that operate critical societal companies.

- **Norway:** individuals attending the inaugural Arctic Six conference on Arctic.

- **Finland:** a group of young people over the age of eighteen who live in Rovaniemi.

The Full POCI Checklist

Decision-makers must understand how Indigenous and local communities view infrastructure before planning a project. This checklist addresses this need to ensure full perspective on critical infrastructure.

Identify more interested parties:

Identify and meet with municipalities, territories, state, federal, regional, Indigenous Nations, organizations, corporations, private and military landowners.

Confirm consent:

Free, prior and informed consent, including matters of national security. Balancing state priorities with local and Indigenous needs is essential.

Widen your definition:

Critical infrastructure is defined differently by user and place. Understand the definitions.

Understand what infrastructure already exists:

The Arctic has built infrastructure that may have been forgotten. Maintenance is often deprioritized in favor of new construction.

Listen more:

Exhaust the list of people and organizations that may have insight into projects.

Establish a shared framework:

Without a common definition, infrastructure planning becomes siloed.

Acknowledge that benefits are not mutually exclusive:

Commercial projects can support national security and vice versa.

Communicate across borders and sectors:

Siloed national approaches ignore the cross-border nature of Indigenous Peoples, and coordinating efforts may have benefits. The same can be said of private, public and science sectors.

Seek opportunities for cost sharing:

Arctic projects should be multi-purpose.

Align priorities:

Local people can maintain infrastructure, while agencies make use of what already exists, lowering costs and improving access.



TIME TO MINE? MINING WITH AND FOR ARCTIC COMMUNITIES

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Attention is turning to the Arctic to meet growing demand for critical minerals from stable, democratic jurisdictions. This renewed interest brings significant economic opportunity, but it also intensifies longstanding governance challenges related to community priorities, environmental protection, Indigenous rights, and benefit sharing.

Arctic mining projects operate across competing time horizons. Exploration and permitting can stretch for decades; construction and operation may last a generation; closure and post-closure impacts extend far longer. These timelines intersect with electoral cycles, seasonal harvesting activities, local labor and income patterns, and short-term commodity price volatility. At the same time, rapid changes in the environment are altering the physical conditions on which both infrastructure and livelihoods depend.



Figure 1

Climate and Human Risks in Arctic Mining Across the Project Lifecycle

Policy Recommendations

1. Engage early with local communities to ensure rights are upheld
2. Develop entry and exit plans together with the community
3. Integrate expertise on the local impacts of environmental change
4. Align business models with community time horizons
5. Apply Arctic-relevant sustainability reporting standards



June on a hike near Sisimiut, Greenland.

Photo credit: Greta Scharnweber



1. Engage early with local communities to ensure rights are upheld

Mining operators need to understand and address potential impacts, both positive and negative, on communities and their environment. Of all mineral showings, defined as deposits identified, but not yet quantified, fewer than 1 in 10,000 ultimately become operating mines. Lengthy and uncertain preparation phases can amplify both hopes and fears, particularly when communities lack access to clear, trusted information. Indigenous Peoples hold rights distinct from those of other local communities, including land and resource rights, that require different decision-making processes. In Arctic regions, youth and other groups often face barriers to participating in formal consultation mechanisms. Workforce imbalance in Arctic mining can reinforce stereotypes and contribute to an unequal distribution of unpaid care and community labor. Traditional hiring patterns mean businesses miss untapped talent.

Recommendations:

- Maintain a consistent presence in the community to understand local governance, social dynamics, and communication norms.
- Communicate early and continuously, providing realistic assessments of project likelihood, timelines, benefits, risks, and impacts, and adapt engagement strategies to local contexts, using both formal and informal communication channels that reflect prevailing social and digital habits.
- Explain how community input will be incorporated into project planning and decision-making, including how local and Indigenous Knowledge will be used.
- Learn about the internal stressors that many local residents and their communities face in the struggle to protect livelihoods and their ways of life.
- On Indigenous territories, follow Indigenous decision-making processes, respect land and resource rights, to secure and maintain continuously free, prior, and informed consent.
- Encourage expansion of the labor force beyond traditional mining profiles and hierarchies, supporting training and re-skilling pathways for all, including local youth, women, elders, and people with disabilities.



2. Develop entry and exit plans together with the community

Mining projects are often evaluated primarily on their entry and operational phases, while closure and post-closure impacts receive limited attention until late in the project lifecycle. Rapid environmental, climatic, and social change means that assumptions at project entry may not hold over time. Failure to plan transparently for both entry and exit can undermine trust, increase long-term environmental liabilities, and create fiscal and governance risks for companies and public authorities alike.

Recommendations:

- Co-develop preliminary entry and exit plans with the local community and Indigenous Peoples, discussing and refining them publicly, integrating expertise in local environmental and social conditions.
- Respond to local priorities, including employment, skills-development, procurement, infrastructure use, and projected community impacts and benefits.
- Include effects on community well-being and essential services such as healthcare, education, public safety, and cultural life in social impact assessments.
- Treat entry and exit plans as living documents and revisit regularly, with clear mechanisms for incorporating community feedback and responding to changing environmental, social, and economic conditions.



3. Integrate expertise on the local impacts of environmental change

The pace and impacts of a changing environment differ dramatically from place to place across the Arctic, creating uncertainty for infrastructure, long-term investment, and community resilience, with the potential for significant economic losses. For example, much of the Arctic is underlain by permafrost. As temperatures rise, widespread permafrost thaw is already underway. The economic consequences depend on future emissions trajectories. In Alaska alone, projected losses to buildings and transportation infrastructure range from \$37 to \$51 billion, depending on the scenario. Emerging hazards relevant to mining operations include infrastructure instability, disrupted transportation and supply chains, degraded water quality, and increased exposure to contaminants and infectious diseases. Projects that utilize local, site-specific environmental knowledge, including Indigenous Knowledge, are more resilient and adaptable to a changing Arctic.

Recommendations:

- Consider the changing environment as a binding design constraint across the full project lifecycle.
- Integrate environment, permafrost, and geotechnical expertise continuously, and pair this with robust governance, inspection, and maintenance systems.
- Apply scientific expertise, including Indigenous Knowledge, on local environmental conditions to project and mitigate risks from changes in permafrost, weather, snow, sea ice, glaciers, and other natural conditions through the project lifecycle, including shifts in critical ecosystem services such as freshwater availability.



Amaroq-resources. Photo: Resource World

4. Align business models with community time horizons

Mining faces a fundamental timing mismatch. Commodity markets move rapidly, with prices fluctuating sharply over short periods, while communities change slowly. Building infrastructure, services, workforce capacity, and cultural resilience requires steady, predictable investment over the long-term. If local revenues track volatile mineral prices too closely, communities can become trapped in boom-and-bust cycles, characterized by overspending during price peaks and shortfalls for essential services during downturns.

Recommendations:

- Streamline business models with both short-term market shifts and long-term community needs.
- Define how benefits will be generated, shared over time with local communities, and protected against price volatility.
- Apply fiscal mechanisms to decouple community well-being from market swings, ensuring predictable support during downturns while allowing communities to benefit during periods of high prices.

5. Apply Arctic-relevant sustainability reporting standards

Mining projects are subject to a growing mix of mandatory and voluntary requirements related to social, environmental, and governance performance. Poorly coordinated reporting can overwhelm stakeholders with excessive or inconsistent information, reducing transparency rather than enhancing it. At the same time, institutional investors increasingly require credible evidence that projects align with environmental standards as well as the rights of the local community. Companies that cannot demonstrate this alignment face higher perceived risk, increased cost of capital, and reduced access to global markets.

Recommendations:

- Select and clearly communicate a sustainability reporting approach that is appropriate for the project considering its geographic, social, and regulatory context. Where mandatory requirements apply, these should be integrated with selected well-recognized voluntary standards relevant to the Arctic.
- Ensure standards address Indigenous rights and governance.



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