

Community Name and State:

Phase I Applicant ID #:

1. Introduce your community by describing: key community demographics, characteristics, history, strengths, and challenges; who is most affected by poor health outcomes; what root causes are driving community health conditions; how the community's health improvement journey began and what catalyzed collective action.
 2. Showcase four accomplishments—specific policies, programs, or strategies—that best reflect your community's response to identified needs and progress toward better health, including how accomplishments address challenges and how they may impact certain geographic areas or populations in the community.
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2019 Culture of Health Prize Application for Sitka, Alaska

The City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska (population: 8,960), is the second largest incorporated city by area in the U.S. with a total area of 4,811 square miles (2,870 square miles is land and 1,941 square miles is water) with approximately 3 persons per square mile. Sitka is an isolated community on Baranof Island, the tenth largest island in the United States. Access is by air, boat or the Alaska State Ferry System. Surrounded by mountains and the ocean, Sitka has a well-defined and restricted footprint, with a road system of just 28 miles, and is quite inaccessible to other communities both on Baranof Island and Southeast Alaska.

The Tlingit people have lived on this land since time immemorial, for more than 10,000 years before the first outpost by the Russian American Company was established in 1799. The Tlingit were driven out of Shee Atiká by the Russians in 1804. Despite being eventually allowed to return in 1821, the Tlingit people were never able to reclaim their land, and they lived under strict surveillance. Canons were pointed toward the area of Shee Atiká where the Tlingit community lived. Known as New Archangel by the Russians, Sitka became the capital of Russian America. The transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States took place in Sitka on October 18, 1867, a date symbolizing grief and trauma for the Tlingit people, whose land was taken from them and sold.

Colonization, stolen land, forced attendance at white boarding schools, the suppression of language, history and cultural practices, and numerous cases of state violence and injustice resulted in generational and historical trauma for indigenous people across the state of Alaska, including the Tlingit people of Sitka. These traumas, along with ongoing institutional inequities, continue to hurt our communities today, contributing to high levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), suicide, patterns of use and misuse of substances, and other health related issues.

Despite these violent forces, the Tlingit people have survived and their leadership and culture is integral to the social and political fabric of Sitka. Indeed, Sitka is home to two governments, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the City and Borough of Sitka, which have a government-to-government relationship. The Alaska Native Brotherhood founded in 1912 and the Alaska Native Sisterhood founded in 1915 fought for citizenship and equal rights for all native persons. These history changing institutions remain active in the community in present day Sitka.

Sitka has been working on addressing our community's racial, social and health disparities, with new strides being made in the last few years. In 2017 and 2018, Sitka has celebrated Indigenous People's Day instead of Columbus Day. The Lt. Governor, Tlingit elders, and local leaders joined a crowd of hundreds of people to honor the Alaska Native People who have been on this land for 10,000 years. Grassroots efforts are also underway to move Sitka's celebration of Alaska Day toward a Reconciliation Day, to provide a thoughtful occasion for inclusive cultural awareness and healing as an alternative to the current traditions, which perpetuate the trauma of the transfer of stolen lands from the Russians to the

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Americans.

In October 2017, at the 11th annual Sitka Health Summit Planning Day, citizen planners selected a community goal that was very much in line with this positive and healing trend. The planners chose to become a trauma informed community, to unite against racism and to have a series of talks and events that would ultimately build relationships and promote understanding, especially between our Native and non-Native community members. At the Sheet'ká Kwáan Naa Kahídi (community house), culture bearers held a televised and well attended open public event on Tlingit culture. Weeks later, the city assembly unanimously passed a non-discrimination ordinance, and Native and Non-Native people joined forces to form the Herring Rock Water Protectors, a group dedicated to preserving the increasingly threatened and vital herring fishery which has significant cultural and nutritional value.

During this time the local radio station provided a series on the effects of colonization. Sitka was colonized by the Russians in 1804 and dozens of social media posts and conversations focused on understanding our history which has been filled with oppression, discrimination and exploitation. In August 2018 Sitka held it's first trauma informed community conference with 114 attendees. Eight organizations partnered to bring a national expert, Dr. Linda Chamberlin, to Sitka to deliver the keynote presentation. Participants also benefited from breakout sessions on decolonization, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and resiliency. The Sitka School District was one of the key leaders of this effort, and they have made great progress in closing the achievement gap between Native and Non-Native students through efforts to become a trauma informed school district. In the last couple of years they have held a series of workshops to promote cultural competency for district employees. In line with this effort, the district changed the name of the elementary school from the Russian-named Verstovia Elementary School to the Tlingit-named Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary School. We have a diverse town and are making progress in this important area with frequent trainings, community conversations and policies related to respect.

The second goal selected at the 2017 Sitka Health Summit Planning Day was to reduce our town's carbon dioxide emissions. Everyone will be affected by climate change, but the people with the least resources will be affected the most. For instance, when a drought hits and food prices spike, or a flood event occurs and folks need to evacuate, its people with less disposable income will experience the greatest consequences. Just days after reducing carbon emissions became a community goal, a dynamic group of volunteers and organizations came together to start the CO₂ reduction action group. They offered mini grants to assist with high visibility conversions where buildings switch from ~~dirty~~ oil burning heating systems that contribute to air pollution and CO₂ emission, to heat pumps that are powered with clean, renewable local energy. The first conversion, at the Hames Center, a non-profit community fitness center, kept an estimated 5 tons of CO₂ out of the atmosphere annually. The second project at the Island Institute, a humanities organization, saved six and a half tons a year. Inspired by the trend, Youth Advocates of Sitka sought out independent funding to convert their own facility.

The group also set up www.sitkacarbonoffset.com, a local carbon offset program with the goal of distributing money with an equity lens. After just a few weeks the group raised nearly enough money to install a modern heat pump for a low/moderate income family. The locally powered heat pump will reduce emissions and result in lower monthly energy bills for that household and it helps all rate payers by contributing to our municipal utility. The more people buying our town's clean, fish-friendly,

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renewable, local hydroelectricity, the more the costs of powering our community can be spread out. This is important because when rates go up, it affects people with limited incomes the most. In addition to reducing CO₂ emissions, improvement in air quality has been made.

Many of the community selected health initiatives support and complement each other. At the very first Sitka Health Summit in 2007, local residents made becoming a more bike and pedestrian friendly community the top goal. In 2008, after a massive grassroots push, Sitka became the first community in Alaska to receive a bicycle friendly award from the League of American Bicyclists. In addition, SEARHC's Edgumbe Hospital started a new program where any resident who received health services in the past year could receive \$100 towards a new bicycle purchased at a local bike shop. The bike shop volunteered to donate an additional \$50 worth of safety gear for program participants. With infrastructure improvement, on-going education, a bike advocacy group and encouragement programs like this, it's no wonder that Sitkans report cycling to work at 10 times the national average.

In 2016, Sitka took another leap forward and became the first and only community in Alaska to protect roadway users, especially vulnerable ones, by passing the Safe Streets – Focused Drivers ordinance that banned using handheld electronic devices while driving. This vote by the City Assembly, plus education and enforcement, has made a huge difference. In 2015, observation surveys revealed that 21.5% of drivers had one hand off the wheel and on something else, usually a cell phone. In 2016, after a massive education and encouragement campaign, the rate dropped to 10.5%. In 2017, a year after the law had been implemented, the rate of phone-based distracted drivers was down to 6.7%, and in 2018 the rate was under 4%! This is one policy that is preventing injuries and helping us to be the walk and bike friendly town that we are.

Another Sitka Health Summit goal that has had an impact on disparities is the newly completed community playground, which opened on July 4, 2018. An amazing array of organizations and people rallied to make Sitka's first and only ADA compliant play structure a reality. This was a remarkable achievement when you consider that our oil dependent state has been in a financial spiral the last several years, greatly impacting the resources available at the local level. After becoming a citizen selected goal, an amazing group of volunteers raised over \$37,000 from events like garage, bake, and T-shirt sales, along with special events, raffles and even proceeds from massages conducted by a local physical therapist. All these events helped generate support and enthusiasm for the playground. An endless amount of volunteer time went toward pounding the pavement to talk to folks and get commitments to help with the project. Local individuals, business and organizations generously contributed \$344,000 worth of in-kind and cash donations, which is a lot for a town of 9,000. Everyone who contributed over \$500 is being commemorated with a Tlingit design inspired fish plaque. The fish (well over 100 in all!) will merrily swim along the playground fence in a permanent display. Local hero, Lynne Brandon, volunteered hundreds of hours to lead up a successful big and small grant writing strategy. All totaled, \$522,971 in grants provided the bulk of the funding.

During the build week in June 2018, over 150 people converged on the site to assemble and place 16 tons of play equipment in a fun, frenzied yet organized two week event. In addition to building a playground the event also built community. As one volunteer put it, "Working here today has been great and this is the most connected I've felt to Sitka." The outpouring of donated food, time, hard work and the spirit of cooperation was inspiring. One of the people who visited during build week was Alaska's

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then-current Governor Bill Walker. He planned on only staying 10 minutes but ended up staying for an hour because he, like so many others, was thrilled to be at the new playground. It's a project he considered an exemplary effort and one that he has shared all over Alaska.

Working together towards a common goal is becoming more prevalent in Sitka. For example, two non-profits, Youth Advocates of Sitka (YAS) and Sitka Counseling, have joined forces to bring a new evidence-based program for families. The family therapy system program is called Parenting with Love and Limits (PLL) and it started in the summer of 2018 with the goal of providing comprehensive services to local kids and families in need. YAS executive director, Charlie Woodcock, explains how special this partnership is, "PLL is used all over the country but Sitka is the only site in the country where two different agencies applied jointly and are working together to provide this service. It's a true partnership." Making new things work in a small community like Sitka, where organizations and individuals are often stretched thin in resources and people power, requires collaboration and trust. YAS and Sitka Counseling have found a path that better serves Sitka's families than either organization could do alone.

Other community partnerships built on a shared desire to help kids led to the creation of the successful Woosheen (working together in Tlingit) preschool and helped to bring the Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise Southeast Alaska (STEPS) grant to Sitka. The new grant will fund a Cultural Specialist with Early Childhood Focus, a Family and Community Connected Project Coordinator, a Post-Secondary Project Coordinator and a Director. Sitka School District Superintendent Mary Wagner explains how partnering made the difference, "What worked in our favor was both that there is a need and that we do have strong buy-ins from our partners." The overarching goal of this is to improve outcomes for kids, which hinges on the partnerships that helped launch the project; the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, the South East Alaska Regional Health Consortium, Sitkans Against Family Violence, and many more are working together to make good things happen for our kids.

The Sitka Indian Child Welfare Act partnership was selected as one of six finalists in the 2018 Honoring Nations Award, which is sponsored by The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Through a focus on healing, relationship building, plus truth, reconciliation and forgiveness, Sitka has achieved a high intervention rate (100% in Sitka compared to 48% in Juneau) and a low rate of child removal (14.5% in Sitka compared to 37% in Kotzebue). The Sitka Tribal Social Services and Sitka Field Office of OCS take the Tribe's healthy relationships course together each year and it is the only state/tribal cohort of its kind in Alaska. Partnering and working together is becoming more common.

To assist and expand on this trend the Sitka Health Summit and the two hospitals in town created the Woosheen Health Networking and Learning group. Every month the hospitals take turns providing lunch and space for people to meet and connect. The purpose of the group is to build relationships, spark partnerships and foster cross sector collaboration, learning, and networking to improve well-being in Sitka, Alaska. One of the partnerships which was sparked at the Woosheen luncheon resulted in a new and very successful Teen Night at the local recreation center that has everything from karaoke to a climbing wall. Every Friday teens have free access to the Hames Center and the caring adults who are volunteering, providing a much needed alternative for vulnerable youth trying to avoid unhealthy behaviors. The need for safe spaces for teens has long been a need in Sitka, but it took collaboration for the new Teen Nights to become a reality.

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Partnering to increase access and address disparities has been the theme of our last few years. Towards the end of our successful year with County Health Rankings & Roadmaps Community Coach Justin Rivas, our coalition got a Healthy Places by Design Action Accelerator grant to start the Sitka School District – Student Activity Fund. Students who qualify for free and reduced school lunch or hardships are now eligible for scholarships, so that they can participate in extracurricular activities, an evidence-based best practice. It was gratifying to listen to the Activities Director talk about students, ones who would not have participated without the scholarships, going on life enriching journeys with classmates. The Fund has several on-going streams, for example every time someone buys a Sitka High School gear 15% of purchase goes to the fund. Now that the school program is up and running, a parallel Community Youth Activity Fund is being established to cover kids and extracurricular activities outside of the Sitka School District.

Getting young people involved in extracurricular activities, a best practice, was furthered helped with the new Healthy Is Here scholarship fund that was inspired in part by the Health Equity Fund. The new program is a partnership between the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the South East Alaska Regional Health Consortium. It provides scholarships for Tribal Citizens so they can participate in the wide variety of summer camps and activities. The variety and depth of activities that are available to young people has grown over the years with a new gymnastics/silks studio opening, a new children's museum, new summer camps, and a new youth theater company through the Sitka Fine Arts Camp.

It's clear that Sitka values it's young people. That's a key factor in why on May 22nd of 2018 the City and Borough of Sitka passed an ordinance to raise the minimum legal sales age to purchase tobacco to 21. Sitka is the first community in Alaska to adopt this long term public health policy which has proven to reduce youth initiation of tobacco up to 50%. This story is being shared across the state and has inspiring other towns to follow suit and keep tobacco out of the hands of high schoolers. Sitka has long been a leader in terms of tobacco prevention and control with a municipal tobacco tax of \$2.46. Our little town is the #8 in the nation, according to the campaign for tobacco free kids, for combined city and state tobacco tax. It's very expensive and hard to buy tobacco in Sitka. Two years ago, Sitka finally got a Drug Free Communities grant and an exciting new task force formed to address youth substance abuse including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and the use of prescription medications. According to the County Health Rankings binge drinking is a major issue and because of this grant and the partnerships that are forming we are better positioned to start dealing with it. The Sitka Police Department has been one of those key partners with its commitment to community policing.

Sitka has a long history of inspiring neighboring communities. The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and its counterpart, the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS), are two nonprofit organizations (founded in 1912 and 1915 respectively) created in Sitka, Alaska to address racism against Alaska Native peoples. ANB/ANS camps spread throughout South East Alaska and for the first half of the 20th century, they were the only organizations working for the civil rights of Alaska Natives in the territory and state.

From establishing the first conservation society in the State in 1967 to establishing the first Farmers Market in Southeast Alaska in 2008 - Sitka has long been a small town with a track record of going first. We are working diligently to continue that tradition with this Culture of Health Prize.