
CUAP

Collectively empowering communities in the Bering Strait region for the development and sustainable management of water and sanitation services.



CUAP Mission

*Strengthening local governance,
financial management, and
utility resilience in rural Alaska.*



Agenda

- History of the CUAP
- Key Goals
- Our Communities – Who we serve
- Boots on the Ground
- Remote Support
- Community Impact
- Success Stories
- Relationship Building
- Challenges & Lessons Learned
- Looking Ahead



History of CUAP

- The Community Utility Assistance Program (CUAP) is a regional partnership in Alaska's Bering Strait region aimed at improving essential utilities – specifically water and sewer services – in local communities. It was established through collaboration between the Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC), Kawerak, Inc., and the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC), with support from other partners, to address long-standing sanitation challenges in the region
- A turning point came from outside philanthropic support. In 2019, representatives of the Helmsley Charitable Trust toured the region (including a visit to Shishmaref) and witnessed the severity of local water and sanitation issues an experience that planted the seed for major assistance. This groundwork, facilitated by Kawerak's longstanding advocacy on water and sewer needs, led to a significant funding opportunity. In June 2021, the Helmsley Charitable Trust awarded a \$20.4 million grant to jumpstart water and sewer improvements in the Bering Strait region, with a large portion dedicated to establishing the CUAP. This generous grant managed in coordination with Engineering Ministries International (eMI) became the catalyst for formally creating the CUAP as a regional program. Soon after, the NSHC Board of Directors and the NSEDC Board of Directors each pledged \$500,000 per year to sustain CUAP's efforts, ensuring ongoing local funding to complement the Helmsley initiative. By late 2021, the foundational pieces were in place: a Memorandum of Agreement between NSHC, Kawerak, and NSEDC defined each organization's roles in the partnership, and community leaders were engaged in shaping the program's design.

Key Goals



- **Improve Best Practice Scores** – Support communities in raising DCRA Best Practice scores above 60%.
- **Build Local Capacity** – Provide training and technical support to strengthen local workforce skills and utility management capacity.
- **Promote Sustainability & Revenue Growth** – Encourage practices that secure long-term service viability, increase revenue streams, and improve utility collection rates.
- **Support Community Services** – Provide a framework for delivering, maintaining, and sustaining essential services that benefit residents.
- **Strengthen Collaboration** – Promote cooperation between CUAP and the City to effectively meet community needs across the Bering Strait Region.

Our Communities

Signed MOA

- Brevig Mission
- Diomedede
- Elim
- Golovin
- Koyuk
- Saint Michael
- Shaktoolik

Hope to sign MOA

- Gambell
- Savoonga

Boots on the Ground



“After learning how to reconcile I enjoy coming to work now.” Kelsi Rock – Alt Bookkeeper City of Brevig Mission

- **Hands-on Support:** Staff travel directly to communities to reconcile records, train clerks, and assist with reporting.
- **Face-to-Face Training:** Builds trust and ensures local staff gain practical, lasting skills.
- **Problem-Solving in Real Time:** Immediate fixes to financial, utility, and compliance challenges on-site.
- **Community Presence:** Demonstrates commitment, reliability, and partnerships beyond remote support.
- **Capacity Building:** Empowers councils and administrators to carry on best practices independently.

Remote Support

- **Efficient Training:** Use Microsoft Teams screensharing to walk clerks through payroll, billing, and reporting.
- **QuickBooks Access Anywhere:** RightWorks cloud hosting allows remote logins and real-time troubleshooting.
- **Cost Savings:** Cuts down on expensive travel while keeping staff supported.
- **Rapid Response:** Issues can be addressed the same day instead of waiting for an on-site visit.
- **Future Potential:** Improved internet means smoother video calls, fewer disconnects, and the ability to expand remote workshops and group trainings.



“I learned so much last time when you were here, and I was excited to show you how much I was able to get done since last time.” – LouAnn Bokeyaktuk, Alternate Bookkeeper

Community Benefits

- **Community Benefits Since 2022**

- \$15K annual Repair & Replacement funds.
- \$15.3K annual subsidies (water/sewer/washeteria).
- Water rate agreements → increased utility revenue.
- Engineering & financial assessments with training.
- Critical repair projects via Community Project Agreements; Emergency repairs funded.
- Grant writing support, Preventative Maintenance Plans & Alaska Maintenance Operation Sustainability Standard analysis.
- Water sampling pilot & sanitation surveys → city cost savings.
- Small Community Emergency Response Plan amendments; home assessments in Elim & Unalakleet.

- **Expanded Training**

- Finance training; Boiler maintenance (17 operators in 2025).
- Customized trainings.
- Water Plant Operator Training: systems, controls, confined space, excavation, FOG, asset management.

- **Results**

- 9 communities achieved Best Practice scores >60.



Community Impact - 2024

Elim

- MAS stepped in to fulfill Bookkeeping duties from September to January.
- Cut costs for Worker's Compensation insurance by saving the city \$40,000 in WC insurance for 2024.

Wales

- MAS played a pivotal role in assisting the community get fuel in the summer of 2024, bringing the various stakeholders together with Crowley.

Teller

- MAS was crucial in assisting the city as they pursue funding to install water & sewer services.
- Sustainability plans and coordination with DEC.

"Our community has directly benefited from CUAP MAS assistance, and we have seen firsthand how their support strengthens our ability to manage our local government effectively. This program has significantly improved our organization's basic functions through staff training, budget development, guidance, and administrative support. Their support allows us to function more efficiently and remain financially stable." – City of Elim

Community Impact -2025

Brevig Mission

- Reconciled 6 years of financial backlog and fixing a \$1,000,000 discrepancy in their books.
- Established internal controls, pay schedule, and monthly billing schedule.
- Coached staff in correctly recording revenue and expenses, as well as billing, payroll, and reporting.
- The community is now able to access the nearly \$500,000 in Community Assistance Program and Payment In Lieu of Taxes with the state of Alaska.

Stebbins

- Reconciled three years of financial backlog
- Discovering and correcting a \$300k error.
- Trained staff to properly perform payroll and paying payroll taxes.
- Trained staff in various reporting with state and federal agencies.
- Established a routine for producing financial reports for the city council. A key part of best practice scores.

Community Impact – Brevig Mission

- *“The CUAP has kept and brought the City of Brevig Mission staff & council into its finest. Bringing all that would require for state and local funding back into great standing for our community of Brevig Mission. Both Clarissa and Joni were able to help the staff and council to gain knowledge and a greater understanding of how to maintain and operate in the city office spaces more efficiently and to get the QuickBooks in each department in a better shape.” – Polly Tocktoo, City of Brevig Mission Grant Writer*



Community Impact - Stebbins

- *“My office was in a downward spiral after too much change in bookkeepers and their lack of education, causing havoc in all areas of finance. With the help of CUAP staff, we are catching up with neglected areas and maintaining better bookkeeping. They offer hands-on problem solving with our QuickBooks. My office is more confident now that they have qualified technicians to assist with bookkeeping needs. They give good advice and make sure you understand processes.” - **Daisy Katcheak, Stebbins City Administrator***



Success Stories – White Mountain

- Consistently High Best Practice Scores since 2022 with an average score of 86.
- Sustained Financial Oversight – MAS has been filling the clerical role until the position is refilled.
- Model for Others - White Mountain serves as an example of how CUAP support strengthens long-term municipal performance.





Building Relationships

- **Foundation for Success** – Strong partnerships with cities, tribes, and councils ensure programs are embraced and sustained.
- **Trust & Transparency** – Communities are more willing to engage when they see consistent communication, accountability, and follow-through.
- **Shared Goals** – Aligning city, tribal, and regional priorities strengthens collective impact on water, sewer, and community services.
- **Capacity Building** – Relationships create pathways for training, mentorship, and knowledge transfer to local staff.
- **Problem-Solving Together** – Collaborative relationships enable joint responses to emergencies, funding challenges, and infrastructure needs.
- **Sustainability** – Long-term relationships help secure resources, maintain compliance, and keep systems running beyond grant cycles.



Challenges

- **Capacity & Consistency** – Frequent city staff turnover; limited local experience in utility and financial management
- **Time Constraints** – Building sustainable systems and training staff requires long-term investment
- **Travel & Weather Barriers** – Harsh weather, flight cancellations, and remote locations hinder on-site support
- **State of Alaska Gaps** – Lack of RUBA (Rural Utility Business Advisor) support, training resources, and hands-on technical assistance
- **Communication Difficulties** – Limited internet/cell coverage, reliance on single points of contact, and inconsistent responsiveness
- **Regulatory Pressures** – Complex reporting and compliance requirements can overwhelm small city administrations
- **Aging Infrastructure** – Old and failing systems increase the workload and urgency for repairs

Lessons Learned

- **Remote ≠ Enough:** Remote support has its place, but real progress happens when we show up in person.
- **Relationships Build Capacity:** Sitting in the office, attending meetings, and being present fosters trust and gives us insight we can't get from afar.
- **Every City is Complex:** All cities operate with some dysfunction, but commitment from people who show up is what matters the most.
- **Tradition Meets Change:** Longstanding ways of doing things provides stability, but they can also limit adaptation to new technologies and systems.
- **Observation is Key:** Simply watching a workday unfold reveals barriers and opportunities invisible on paper.



Looking Ahead

More travel to communities.

More training.

Expanded bookkeeping services.





Closing

CUAP is not just fixing books – we're building capacity and trust in our communities.

