

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

January 24, 2023

1:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Cathy Giessel

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Donald Olson, Vice Chair
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS OVERVIEW

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SANDRA MOLLER, Director
Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCRA)
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the Division of Community and Regional Affairs overview.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR FORREST DUNBAR called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel and Chair Dunbar. Senator Bjorkman joined the meeting immediately thereafter.

SENATOR BJORKMAN joined the meeting at 1:32 p.m.

COMMITTEE INTRODUCTIONS

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked the members to introduce themselves and what they hope to get from this committee. He introduced himself and stated that this committee is instrumental in learning about and supporting the state's local communities, particularly in rural Alaska. He cares very much about all Alaska communities, from the Bush to regional hubs and larger urban centers. He invited each committee member to introduce themselves and share their interest in serving on the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee.

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SENATOR GIESSEL introduced herself and expressed delight in serving on this committee. She said it is important to serve all Alaskans, particularly in rural Alaska. She stated that she is a nurse practitioner and is especially concerned about healthcare services in rural Alaska.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN introduced himself. He commented that legislative actions should be in harmony with local governmental units and deliver constitutionally mandated services to communities all over the state. He expressed excitement to be on the committee and discuss issues vital to local municipalities.

CHAIR DUNBAR dovetailed off Senator Bjorkman's comments, adding that he hopes to improve the relationship and coordination between state and local governments.

OVERVIEW:
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY and REGIONAL AFFAIRS

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CHAIR DUNBAR announced the committee would hear an overview from the Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCRA) today. He invited Ms. Moller to put herself on the record and begin the presentation.

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SANDRA MOLLER, Director, Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCRA), Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Anchorage, Alaska, presented the Division of Community and Regional Affairs overview. She briefly described her background as a civil engineer, employment in the public health sector, and with the Alaska Energy Authority. She explained her experience gave her an understanding of Alaska's

rural water and sewer projects and rural energy needs. She works with the community governance side of issues at DCRA. A passion for communities led her to work for DCRA. She said that working with people to solve problems describes her job. She explained the division is broad; she will offer a quick look at its programs. The division has 48 staff members.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 2, stating DCRA is the only division mentioned in the constitution:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Constitution of the State of Alaska

Article 10, Section 14: "An agency shall be established by law in the executive branch of state government to advise and assist local governments. It shall review their activities, collect and publish local government information, and perform other duties prescribed by law." That's DCRA!

MS. MOLLER remarked that the Alaska Constitution indicates the division is supposed to work closely with communities across the state.

MS. MOLLER reviewed slide 3, Mission:

DCCED Mission: Promote a healthy economy, strong communities, and protect consumers in Alaska.

DCRA Mission: Helping Alaska's communities build sustainable economies and a means of self-governance.

MS. MOLLER said DCRA was a department at one time but was merged with the Department of Commerce and Economic Development to form the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. She emphasized that DCRA promotes self-governance at the local level and stated that problems that occur at the local level require problem-solving at the local level. She said this reflects her leadership approach for DCRA.

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MS. MOLLER expounded on slide 4, Presentation Overview. She said DCRA has three core areas to assist communities:

Local Government Assistance

MS. MOLLER said DCRA is known for Local Government Assistance. It is a large group with 22 staff members and contains the designated local government specialists (LGSS).

Grants and Funding

MS. MOLLER informed the committee that DCRA administers almost \$1 billion in federal and state grant funds. The number of grants and amounts fluctuate. She said the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds raised the balance to \$1.5 billion.

Mapping Analytics, and Data Resources (MADR)

MS. MOLLER said Mapping Analytics, and Data Resources is a critical piece of the division. The primary function of this core area is to collect information and data per Alaska's constitutional mandate. The division uses a product called Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri) to build software dashboards and other data conveyances. Esri frames, tells the story, and illustrates the importance of the collected data. This group prepared eight required reports for submission to the legislature.

Commissions and Councils

MS. MOLLER said although Commissions and Councils is not included in the three core areas mentioned above, it was added here because it plays a role in assisting communities.

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At ease.

CHAIR DUNBAR reconvened the meeting and invited Senator Bjorkman to pose a question.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether there are opportunities for DCRA to partner with other state agencies to build a unified, combined, strategic-use database for all layers of imagery collected agency-wide.

MS. MOLLER answered yes, DCRA recently received data from DOTPF for a mapping project. DOTPF also offered to deliver detailed data, making the most active information available to the

division. She revealed that her theme for this year is "Collaboration for the Benefit of Communities."

MS. MOLLER said when she is in a quandary, she likes to find solutions by asking herself what is best for the community; it is also a question she instills in her team to ask. She asserted that the best data delivery method combines data with telling a story. She said she would explain this further when she reviews the grants dashboard later in the presentation. Esri products have evolved and are useful in collaborating with other agencies. They have been used with the Division of Corporations, Business, and Professional Licensing (CBPL) and the Broadband Office to help map efforts and coordinate with community and grants. She said there is overlap and opportunity to expand collaboration efforts.

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether she ever ran into issues obtaining layers of data sets or metadata from other departments that were readily usable in her coordination efforts.

MS. MOLLER answered that she could not think of an example off-hand. She indicated the division is on the cusp of acknowledging it can be done. She said that other agencies had never denied her a data request. She said there is room for improvement and brought up DCRA's responsibility to collect elected official data, like who are the mayors and council members in communities statewide. She suggested working with the Division of Elections to populate DCRA's database in real-time would be a smoother process and provide better public access to that information.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 5, which drew attention to the Alaska Constitution and a map showing all the boroughs and cities in Alaska:

Communities and Regions of Alaska

Article 10, Section 1: "... maximum local self-government with a minimum of local government units... A liberal construction shall be given to the powers of local government units."

MS. MOLLER said the map is updated every year. She noted that DCRA was involved with the recent census and readjusting Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA's). Alaska has many boroughs and one unorganized borough. The last time the state had a city incorporate was in 2016, and that was Whale Pass. The

city of Manokotak did an annexation expanding its city boundary in 2015. Petersburg was the last borough formed, and that was in 2011. The constitution's founders anticipated the development of boroughs and cities; they wanted local governments to have the power of self-governance to solve their problems and promote their economies. She said of the approximately 400 communities in Alaska, 325 are active. A community of two people would not be considered active. One hundred ninety-six communities are in the best practices Rural Utility Business Advisor (RUBA) Program. Engaging with local governments to empower them to do what is needed is vital to self-governance.

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked whether DCRA assists communities if they want to incorporate, annex, or divide.

MS. MOLLER responded that the constitution outlines the process, and regulations spell out the steps. The Local Boundary Commission (LBC) falls under the purview of DCRA. LBC hears petitions and visits sites before rendering a decision. Staff provides technical assistance to petitioners but does not write the petition.

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MS. MOLLER reviewed slide 6, stating Local Government Assistance is one of the three core areas of focus mentioned above. This slide lists ways DCRA assists communities. She addressed the differences between Local Government Assistance and RUBA tasks because they are often confused:

Rural Utility Business Advisor (RUBA)

MS. MOLLER stated that RUBA is a program that reviews utilities and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funds it. DCRA does this work in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The program reviews utilities and smaller cities that run their own utilities. She explained that some communities have too large a population to qualify for the RUBA program; there are specific criteria to qualify. RUBA is a service provided to 196 communities and aims to help utilities establish operation and maintenance best practice scores (BPScores).

MS. MOLLER said local government specialists assist communities with elections, ordinances, and other affairs, which are listed below:

Community Resilience (Risk MAP and NFIP)

MS. MOLLER indicated the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) primarily funds the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). NFIP works with communities whose infrastructure is threatened by events like storm surges, permafrost thawing, and erosion.

Office of the State Assessor

MS. MOLLER said that the Office of the State Assessor analyzes reported property tax from applicable communities and compiles the data in an Alaska Taxable publication. The state assessor uses this information to calculate "the full value determination" and provides it to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) every October, used in school funding to share school costs.

ANCSA Municipal Land Trust (MLT)

MS. MOLLER briefly summarized the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Villages received land after ANCSA was passed and were required to give land to municipalities or the state in the municipal land trust.

Local Boundary Commission (LBC)

MS. MOLLER said the Local Boundary Commission provides technical assistance to communities.

MS. MOLLER said that she started the presentation with Local Government Assistance because she believes the health and prosperity of the state directly correlate to healthy local governments, economies, businesses, and governance.

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MS. MOLLER summarized slide 7, stating DCRA works with these entities:

Alaskan Local Government

Local Government Units:

- Boroughs
- Cities
- The unorganized borough

- Tribal governments

- ANCSA Corporations
 - Nonprofits
 - For profits
 - Regional
 - Local
- Health Consortiums

Classifications

- Home Rule
- First Class
- Second Class

- School Districts
 - (run by local governments)
- REAAS
 - (school districts run by the state)

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked Ms. Moller to explain what an REAA is for the benefit of the public.

MS. MOLLER answered the acronym REAA stands for Rural Education Attendance Area.

MS. MOLLER summarized slide 8, stating local government specialists are actually generalists because they never know what will be asked of them. The division has a "resource desk" populated monthly with pertinent community information, like step-by-step instructions covering elections, alcohol sales, and relevant information for community-based frequently asked questions. She disclosed that staff tracks the type of questions received and who requests them; stating it is important to know your audience. This list is a smattering of the types of topics staff address:

Elections
 Title 29 Compliance
 Financial Management
 Utility Management
 Personnel Management
 Power Cost Equalization
 Title 4 Local Option Laws
 Regional Training Workshops
 Ordinances, Resolutions, Codes
 Disaster Response
 ... whatever crosses their desk

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SENATOR GIESSEL directed attention to "Elections" on slide 8. She recalled the need for more poll workers in the previous election. She asked whether DCRA works with the Division of Elections to ensure polling locations stay operational and open.

MS. MOLLER answered that DCRA always helps and assists. She expressed her belief that DCRA's local government specialists are the eyes and ears on the ground. They are able to enlist help by asking a mayor, a city manager, or community members with whom they have a relationship. For example, local government specialists helped deploy census information and CARES information. DCRA also helps field questions outside its purview, like Power Cost Equalization (PCE) Program questions. The division is able to help the Division of Elections and has done so in the past.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 9, stating utility management assistance is EPA funded, and there has been some concern on best practice scoring. This program encourages best practice duties, like regular meetings, maintaining minutes, establishing budgets, balancing ledgers, payroll liability compliance, and paying taxes. These best practices help utilities acquire a more robust business model, as outlined on slides 9 through 11 and shown in detail on slide 12.

Rural Utility Business Advisors

Utility Management Assistance

- EPA funded
- Support for communities operating water/wastewater utilities
- Remote & on-site assistance

Best Practices Scoring

- 32-hour trainings on utility management
- Workers' compensation coverage
- Payroll liability compliance
- Meetings of the governing body
- Financial management practices:
 - Budgeting
 - Financial reporting

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slides 10 and 11 showing two cycle diagrams containing RUBA assessment components. She emphasized that the assessment components are inter-related, and falling short in one area affects the entire cycle:

- The first diagram components are financial solvency, management capacity, personnel practices, federal and state compliance, and safety practices. The components are all connected.
- The second diagram components are bulk fuel facility management, road maintenance, local elections, economic development, and water and wastewater utility management. The components are all connected.

She said it is the job of local government specialists to determine where disruptions in the cycle occur and that it is not always readily apparent. Local government specialists spend a lot of time sleuthing where hang-ups originate. A city could operate any or all of these components in any given community, which is why the Community Database Online (CDO) is important. The database contains information like who owns a particular power plant or runs the water system. The database is a resource available to everyone. She said the explanation above provides an overview of best practices.

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked whether DCRA incentivizes local government participation in the program.

MS. MOLLER answered that she likes to think of the division's role as advisory; the division has no regulatory authority. She asserted local governments with vision are self-motivated, organized, transparent, and hold meetings, resulting in an informed public.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 12, stating the data on this slide has evolved over the year and is worthy of a three-hour discussion. This slide breaks best practice scoring into three categories. A community can score up to 100 points in these three categories: technical, managerial, and financial. DEC oversees the technical category, and DCRA oversees the managerial and financial categories.

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O & M Best Practice Scoring

Technical - DEC

<u>Category</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Points</u>
<i>Operator Certification</i>	Utility has more than one operator certified to the level of the water system.	10
	Primary operator is certified to the level of the water system and the backup operator holds some level of certification in water treatment or distribution.	7
	Primary operator is certified to the level of the water system and the backup operator holds no certification or there is no backup operator.	5
	Utility has one or more operators certified at some level in water treatment or distribution.	3
	Utility has no certified operators.	0
<i>Preventive Maintenance Plan</i>	Utility has a written PM plan; PM is performed on schedule; records of completion are submitted on a quarterly basis and have been verified.	25
	Utility has a written PM plan; performance of PM and record keeping are not consistent.	
	Utility has no PM plan or performs no PM.	0
<i>Compliance</i>	Utility had no Monitoring and Reporting violations during the past year.	10
	Utility had up to five Monitoring and Reporting violations during the past year.	5
	Utility had more than five Monitoring and Reporting violations during the last year.	0

Total Technical Points 45

Managerial and Financial - DCRA

Utility Management Training A person who holds a position of responsibility for management of the utility has completed a DCRA approved Utility Management course or other utility management training course within the last five years. 5

Meetings of the Governing Body The utility owner's governing body meets routinely consistent with the local ordinance/bylaw requirements and receives a current report from the operator. 5

The utility owner's governing body does not meet. 0

Total Managerial Points 10

Budget Utility owner and the Utility have each adopted a realistic budget and budget amendments are adopted as needed; Accurate monthly budget reports are prepared and submitted to the governing body. 15

Either the Utility or the Utility owner has adopted a budget and implemented a budget, the other has not. 13

Either the Utility or the Utility owner has adopted a budget, but it is not being implemented. 10

Utility owner and the Utility have not adopted a budget. 0

Revenue Utility is collecting revenue sufficient to cover the Utility's operating expenses and to contribute to a repair and replacement account. 20

Utility is collecting revenue sufficient to cover expenses. 15

Utility has a fee schedule and a collection policy that is followed. 5

Utility has no fee structure or collection policy. 0

Worker's Compensation Utility has had a workers' compensation policy for all employees for the past two 5

<i>Insurance</i>	years and has a current policy in place.	
	Utility has a current workers' compensation policy in place for all employees.	2
	Utility has no workers' compensation policy.	0
<i>Payroll Liability Compliance</i>	Utility has no past due tax liabilities and is current with all tax obligations.	5
	Utility owes back taxes, but has a signed payment agreement, is current on that agreement, and is up-to-date with all other tax obligations.	2
	Utility is not current with its tax obligations and/or does not have a signed repayment agreement for back taxes owed.	0
Total Financial Points		45

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MS. MOLLER said scoring is done in January and July. Results are stored on the DCRA dashboard, so members can access their numbers and use them as a guide for improvement. DCRA offers training to utilities to boost their scores. She indicated 196 RUBA communities are scored, and not every single [utility in Alaska participates in the program]. She noted DEC and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) use the scorecard to prioritize water and sewer projects for funding. She concluded the section on local government specialists and segued into the Grants and Funding Section.

MS. MOLLER reviewed slide 13, Grants Statute & Staff. She said the Grants and Funding Section has eight staff. Granting authority comes from AS 37.05 Public Finance-Fiscal Procedures Act, AS 44.33.020(18) and (20), and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 2 CFR 200. She said that 90 percent of DCRA's work provides oversight and implementation for both state and federal programs to assist applicants and monitor and ensure they meet requirements. The division works with these types of grantees: municipalities, tribes, nonprofit community associations, state agencies and other entities.

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MS. MOLLER read slide 14, Grants Fast Facts. This slide provides a quick snapshot of the number of DCRA grants and staff workload. She said that values change, but as of last week, DCRA had almost \$1 billion in grants, 723 active grants with 21 programs, and eight staff in Fairbanks and Anchorage that administer these grants. She divided 723 active grants by eight

staff to determine each staff person is responsible for about 90 grants.

MS. MOLLER gave an overview of slide 15, which differentiated between various grants and funding sources. The slide showed nine federal and five state grant and revenue sharing programs. She said the slide provides a good reference for the different types of programs legislators might see throughout the session.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 16. It lists 14 federal grants and programs: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Community Development Block Grant - Coronavirus Relief (CDBG-CV), Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR), Community Development Block Grant - Mitigation (CDBG-MIT), Coronavirus Relief Fund (CARES), Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Community Services Block Grant Coronavirus Relief (CSBG-CV), Emergency Law Enforcement Assistance Grants (ELEA), National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska Grants, Seafood Coronavirus Relief Fund, Targeted Airshed Grants, Seafood Processors Pandemic Response Relief Program, National Forest Receipts/Secure Rural Schools, and Payment In Lieu of Taxes.

MS. MOLLER highlighted three of the grants listed above:

1. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

MS. MOLLER highlighted the Community Development Block Grant, which has an application process that is scored. DCRA receives \$2 to \$3 million per year to administer these grants. This grant permits a variety of projects. It targets low to moderate-income communities, and [a community] may receive up to \$850 [thousand].

2. Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR)

MS. MOLLER stated that the division received \$35 million from a FEMA grant to administer funds to Anchorage, Mat-Su, and the Kenai Peninsula, which were affected by the November 30, 2018 earthquake.

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CHAIR DUNBAR commented that the CARES Act included a couple hundred million dollars for a small business grant program. He recalled this grant had distribution challenges. He expressed his belief that only \$18 million was distributed, at least

initially. He asked whether DCRA administered this grant and, if so, what distribution challenges DCRA faced.

MS. MOLLER answered that a different division within the department administered that grant. DCRA administered a \$568 million CARES Act allocation. She clarified that it was a legislative allocation. DCRA's job was to administer and get those funds out the door to communities. DCRA's staff of eight turned the money around within two weeks after the legislature approved the funds through a grant mechanism.

MS. MOLLER highlighted the third grant:

3. Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

MS. MOLLER said that some individuals refer to PILT as a pass through. However, the distribution of PILT funds requires following a specific process that is in a later slide. She said DCRA administers a Department of Public Safety (DPS) grant and a Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) grant on behalf of both departments. The DPS grant is approximately \$6 million for Public Safety housing in rural Alaska, and DCRA works with the Fairbanks North Star Borough on its targeted airshed air quality grant.

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SENATOR GIESSEL said most senators have concerns about the affordability, access, and lack of childcare services. She heard federal funds were made available but not distributed to childcare delivery nonprofits. She asked whether DCRA was responsible for the distribution of these funds.

MS. MOLLER answered that DCRA was not responsible for those funds, adding that the Department of Health (DOH), formerly known as the Department of Health and Social Services, would likely distribute those funds.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 17, which contained a list of seven state grants & programs:

- Community and Neighborhood Watch Program
- Community Mapping Project
- Designated Legislative Grants

MS. MOLLER pointed out that Designated Legislative Grants are funds the legislature approves through the capital budget. DCRA

administers these grants as soon as the legislature approves them. Grants like the Port of Alaska at Anchorage fit this grant category; DCRA administers this grant in conjunction with the Municipality of Anchorage. Designated Legislative Grants are typically five-year grants, and DCRA has 149 of them currently. She said the division works with the grantee in administering the grant; slide 18 depicts this process.

GO Bond Grants
Commercial Passenger Vessel Grants
Community Assistance Program

MS. MOLLER said the Community Assistance Program (CAP) was formerly known as revenue sharing. CAP is state-funded and administered through DCRA.

Shared Fisheries Business Tax/Fisheries Resource
Landing Tax

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MS. MOLLER skimmed over slide 18, Typical Grant Lifecycle. She said a grant is rarely spent in one year; it is usually over multiple years. Designated Legislative Grants are typically five years and can be extended.

1. Develop & Implement Programs
2. Solicit Applications & Make Awards
3. Conduct Negotiations, Execute Grant & Agreements

MS. MOLLER said that the amount of time needed for step 3 depends on the grantee, and sometimes delays occur while trying to define the exact scope of a grant. Scope, schedule, and budget define step 3. A comprehensive scope of what the funder wants is critical, and DCRA staff invests time in figuring this out.

4. Track in DCRA -Grants Database
5. Provide Technical Assistance
6. Administer Grant & Monitor Compliance
7. Final Reporting & Grant Closeout

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MS. MOLLER summarized slide 19, Revenue Sharing Cycle. She said sometimes individuals call the typical revenue sharing cycle a pass through; however, revenue sharing does not involve receiving a check one day and mailing it out the next. DCRA has to go through the seven-step process on slide 19 to ensure the

division is tracking the requirements of a given program. She said that understanding the program's intended purpose is integral to properly implementing the grant. She spends more time at the front end of a grant figuring out its intended purpose. By way of example, she referenced the newly established Broadband Office, which is in the middle of defining its granting process. The Broadband Office will disperse millions through the Federal Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act. DCRA will help the Broadband Office determine the process so it can quickly administer funds. A big part of the cycle is tracking; DCRA's online community database and dashboards are set up to help with tracking. The following are the typical steps in a revenue sharing cycle.

Typical Revenue Sharing Cycle

1. Solicit Applications To Eligible Communities

MS. MOLLER said CAP is a revenue sharing program. DCRA staff spend time notifying communities to make sure they apply.

2. Outreach To Non-Responsive Communities

3. Review Applications Received

4. Confirm Eligibility & Final Funding Amounts

5. Track in DCRA eGrants Database

6. Review & Process Required Documents

7. Distribute Funding & Close Out

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SENATOR BJORKMAN commented that the Kenai Peninsula Borough created a bounty system, explaining internet service providers attained customers by connecting homes to the internet. They did not receive grant money by merely building infrastructure or running underground cables. He asked whether the Broadband Office would be interested in pursuing this type of model.

MS. MOLLER replied that this model would be an option, although it is not under her purview. Adopting the model would be under the purview of the Broadband Office. She explained that the Broadband Office was merely an example of how DCRA interfaces to ensure the granting process is adequate and meets the requirements. She said that the Broadband Office director wants to ensure the customer is served. She suggested conversing with the director about models. She reiterated that DCRA's role is to ensure a proper and fair process.

SENATOR BJORKMAN expressed interest in holding conversations with the Broadband Office.

CHAIR DUNBAR indicated that he is also interested, and the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee might be a good venue for discussions if the chair agrees.

SENATOR BJORKMAN, chair of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee, agreed that Labor and Commerce would be a good venue for holding discussions.

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MS. MOLLER reviewed slide 20, Grants Data. She said that DCRA tracks all the data discussed above on dashboards. Dashboards provide users glimpses of usable information, so the user can readily locate data. Slide 20 pictures the grants data dashboard. Data on the dashboard is not static; data is updated in real-time as grants are closed out. Users can apply filters by "community" and "type of grant" or see how many grants are active under contract. The dashboard is a great tool for finding district information, like how many grants a community has and other related questions.

MS. MOLLER gave a cursory review of slide 21, Technical Assistance. DCRA assists grantees with technical issues like environment reviews, civil rights, labor standards, site control, insurance requirements, procurement standards, project management, budgets, reporting requirements, and audit requirements. Site control can be difficult to achieve. DCRA does not want to spend public money on projects that do not have legal access. DCRA staff spends time with grantees on site control, environmental reviews, ascertaining whether there is contamination, etcetera. This slide offers a sense of the issues grant teams and others help grantees manage. For example, the DPS grant that the division is doing for law enforcement housing has stalled in some communities due to code, environmental, and site control issues that can slow progress.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 22, Mapping Analytics, and Data Resources. She said this group has six staff members. The Community Database Online tracks community information and is the division's leading Esri software product. This group also does mapping and geographic information systems (GIS). She mentioned the Broadband Office has mapping requirements and that this group has lent support in this area. Two programs this

group inherited are the Made in Alaska and Alaska Product Preference Program.

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MS. MOLLER advanced to slides 23 to 26 which expound on the Community Database Online (CDO). Slide 23 pictured a quick response (QR) code. She encouraged members to try it by clicking on any community to learn its incorporation date, the population, the mayor, and there is even a "how do you pronounce it" key to assist users with indigenous language pronunciation. It is a wealth of information on any community.

MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 24 and explained that the division can now create a lot of little databases on dashboards with Esri software. She said that DCRA works with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), the Division of Elections, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to obtain digital datasets. Users extract information, organizing datasets in different ways and formats. She drew attention to the "Explore Alaska's Open Data" search field on slide 24. It offers the user a variety of options to explore, retrieve, and present data. She mentioned the MADR team also collects fuel price data at the retail level from 100 communities to create the annual Alaska Fuel Price Report. It includes the average cost of gasoline, jet fuel, and other information. The MADR team publishes this informative report.

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MS. MOLLER summarized slides 25 and 26, which picture the community-driven data and data-driven solutions available on the database. She said each community has a story map, a tool to impart information about that community. It can include photos and plans. She said ANTHC once called to obtain information about its water system and where it was built; the division was able to provide some old maps. She said there is a lot of work to be done, but some resources are available on the database. The data is helpful to individuals working with communities threatened by storm events and other natural disasters. She pointed out a handful of dashboards in the database, including a RUBA community scoreboard. She encouraged members to explore these dashboards to see all the information collected. She said DCRA also welcomes suggestions about valuable data that should be added to the database.

Community-Driven Data

- Detailed StoryMaps for over 400 communities in Alaska
- Community Profile maps with parcel, infrastructure, and utility data
- Community Photo Library
- Community Plans Library

Data-Driven Solutions

- Topical webpages and StoryMaps
- Longitudinal datasets presented for yearly comparison
- Detailed dashboards to track key metrics

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MS. MOLLER summarized the statistics on slides 27 and 28, Made in Alaska:

- Promoting State guaranteed Alaskan made products since 1992
- > 1,100 permitted products
- > 850 Alaskan businesses
- 4K Facebook Followers; 1.6K Instagram Followers
- 82.1% report that MIA membership helps promote their product
- \$0.63 of every dollar you spend on MIA products is invested back into Alaska

[2:24:58 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR asked how many staff administer the Made in Alaska program and for a brief description of the program. He wondered whether DCRA does the permitting on these products and asked her to explain the permitting process.

MS. MOLLER answered an applicant may apply online for the Made in Alaska program. There are thresholds to confirm a product is made in Alaska before it is approved. MADR does not have a full-time staff person designated for the Made in Alaska program. MADR is group of six; the administrative assistant does the clerical processing, including the sale of the Made in Alaska stickers. There is room for growth in this program.

MS. MOLLER discussed the Manufacturer of the Year Award on slide 28. She said this is a good way to highlight Alaska's local businesses.

MS. MOLLER skimmed over slide 29, which lists the specifics of the Alaska Product Preference Program:

- Alaska products for State of Alaska work
- 3%, 5%, or 7% bid preference for Alaskan made products in State procurement
- State spending going back to the local economy

[2:26:30 PM](#)

MS. MOLLER reviewed the five Commissions and Councils on slide 30:

Serve Alaska State Service Commission

Local Boundary Commission

MS. MOLLER said the Local Boundary Commission works with municipalities to adjust their boundaries.

Minerals Commission

MS. MOLLER said the Minerals Commission meets once or twice yearly; DCRA is staff to the commission. The commission creates an [annual] report which contains a record of their activities. The Legislature will receive the report soon.

Alaska Native Language Preservation Council

MS. MOLLER indicated this council is in statute and contains five board members representing languages across the state. The council meets to promote the preservation of indigenous languages. The regions work extensively with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

Alaska Regional Development Organizations

MS. MOLLER stated the Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORs) support regional economic development efforts. DCRA is staff to ARDORs. ARDOR was instrumental in getting communities to apply for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds which helped get funds out. She said each ARDOR is doing great work.

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MS. MOLLER highlighted slide 31, Serve Alaska State Service Commission. She said this is a state commission with four staff, primarily federally funded. Slide 31 reads as follows:

Serve Alaska State Service Commission

Serve Alaska, in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), brings AmeriCorps programs to Alaska. The Serve Alaska sub-grantees operate in almost every region of the state, bringing much needed support and training to rural and urban Alaska.

Mission

We seek to foster, support and promote the ethic of service and volunteerism by inviting all Alaskans to contribute their time and talents to build healthy communities through the six focus areas.

- Disaster Services
- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Environmental Stewardship
- Healthy Futures

Veterans and Families

[2:28:09 PM](#)

MS. MOLLER advanced to slide 32, AmeriCorps Programs. She stated AmeriCorps and VISTA are examples of organizations DCRA works with through grants. DCRA grants to the agencies listed below through the Serve Alaska Program, noting they meet quarterly:

AmeriCorps Programs

- Alaska Public Defender Agency Social Advocate
AmeriCorps Members Ensuring Justice
- Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Resilient
Alaska Youth
- United Way of Southeast Alaska, Juneau AmeriCorps
Program
- Sitka School District, AmeriCorps Program

- The Student Conservation Association
- Revilla Island Corps (RiCorps) at Ketchikan Afterschool Program
- Alaska Children's Trust / Alaska After School Network

[2:28:31 PM](#)

She expressed enthusiasm that the division has these new planning grantees:

*Planning Grantees

- Alaska Food Policy Council
- United Way of Anchorage

*The purpose of a planning grant is to support an organization's development of a new AmeriCorps program. During the planning period, the applicant designs an AmeriCorps program which addresses a need in their community or communities.

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CHAIR DUNBAR sought clarification about DCRA's role with these organizations, for example, AmeriCorps. He asked whether DCRA helps entities apply to AmeriCorps or whether DCRA administers grants, something akin to a pass through.

MS. MOLLER expressed her belief that Serve Alaska was once its own separate division. She remarked that DCRA is a great place for programs that do not have a home, clarifying that the role of DCRA is to house Serve Alaska. DCRA and Serve Alaska work closely together on community programs. She gave the example of Rural CAP with whom DCRA has grants and with whom Serve Alaska deploys AmeriCorps members all over the state. The link between DCRA and Serve Alaska is that they both affect Alaska's communities, which is probably why it is housed within the division. She added that there is no constitutional mandate that Serve Alaska be housed within the division.

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether Serve Alaska is relatively free-standing within the division.

MS. MOLLER answered yes. Serve Alaska is a separate budget component within the division managed separately by an executive director.

[2:30:36 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL commented that this is fantastic information. She thanked Ms. Moller for the presentation.

[2:30:50 PM](#)

MS. MOLLER stated slides 33 and 34 demonstrate that the state's \$216,400 investment in Serve Alaska leverages \$3.6 million in other funding. This is almost a 17-fold increase:

Facts & Figures

IN 2021-2022 FOR \$216,400 IN STATE FUNDS, ALASKA RECEIVED:

Federal Funding: \$2,126,850

- AmeriCorps Program Funding: \$1,599,239
- AmeriCorps Program Funding: \$1,599,239
- Commission Investment Fund: \$ 149,278

Local Match: \$ 1,045,571

Education Awards: \$484,758

State Appropriation: \$216,400

TOTAL RESOURCES LEVERAGED: \$3,657,179

14,439 CLIENTS SERVED	227 VOLUNTEERS RECRUITED	1,132 VOLUNTEER HOURS
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MS. MOLLER summarized the presentation, stating the programs housed within DCRA focus on community health and prosperity and assisting communities to navigate through trying times. The division likes to provide relevant and informative reports. DCRA creates dashboards for frequently asked questions to help people find answers. She said a healthy community equals a healthy state.

[2:32:37 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN thanked Ms. Moller for presenting today and for all the great work, support, and training DCRA provides the state. He emphasized that it is noticed and appreciated. He

pointed out that during his tenure with the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly, the division's partnership with the Alaska Municipal League provided great resources and support to his borough, municipalities, and governmental units across the state.

MS. MOLLER said those comments are appreciated, adding DCRA has dedicated and passionate staff.

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked where DCRA's offices are primarily located.

MS. MOLLER answered DCRA has seven offices across the state. The majority of staff are located in Anchorage and number about 20. Fairbanks primarily handles grant programs, and some local government specialists are stationed there. DCRA has a presence in Juneau, Dillingham, Bethel, Kotzebue, and Nome.

CHAIR DUNBAR asked what DCRA's legislative priorities are or if there is any legislation she would like to highlight.

MS. MOLLER answered no legislative priorities are coming to mind at this moment. Legislative support for the division is always helpful. She welcomes suggestions for what could be done better. She will contact the committee if a legislative priority comes to mind. She said the division inherited several programs that might need attention, but at this point she has nothing more to report.

CHAIR DUNBAR urged Ms. Moller to return if something comes up, stating the committee is receptive to her work. He expressed his belief that the Senate has a great passion for local government and rural areas and wants to be of assistance.

[2:36:38 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunbar adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 2:36 p.m.