
Permafrost & Infrastructure Symposium Reflection

North Slope Borough Port Authority | Hina Kiloni

Before I report on my main takeaways from the Permafrost & Infrastructure Symposium, I would like to share my gratitude to Jana, Billy, and all the members involved in creating one of the most meaningful conferences I have ever attended. I would also like to thank all participants who attended and shared space and knowledge regarding topics that directly impact our communities on the North Slope.

The most beneficial takeaway for me was understanding how vital it is to translate the work of subject matter experts into actionable items for our communities. Elaborating on the definition of infrastructure was eye-opening because, as Liza mentioned, culture was a component that has been drastically overlooked by many. An example is when the North Slope Borough Port Authority brought FEMA representatives to present a workshop to our community on participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). One of the questions was whether a *sigluaq* (ice cellar) was considered infrastructure that would be insurable under the NFIP. This gap is evident in many rules and regulations that come down from the federal and state levels, as many of them are created as sort of boilerplates meant to encompass the masses.

This conflicts with the push for a more inclusive and equitable society because not all jurisdictions incur the same issues. Understanding this, at the local level, we can use the data presented by subject matter experts to leverage cases unique to the North Slope. The North Slope Borough consists of “only” about 10,000 residents. Still, we are also the hub of US Arctic research and at the forefront of Arctic maritime opportunities, which continues to gain interest from the government. Topics that the Federal government should consider include, but are not limited to, homeland security and defense, receding ice and its impacts, e.g., increased maritime traffic. And they have been having these conversations, but not with the communities in the North Slope Borough. And if they have reached out to the community, they don’t reach out to other communities in the region.

Participating in this symposium has led to discussions on how researchers can better streamline the work in the Arctic and house the information in a central location to benefit researchers and community members. Researchers can search for prior employment that they can build on or support their proposed work. Community members can also browse through the hub to see what work is being done and by whom, and if they have an interest in the research or know of partnership opportunities, they can pursue a partnership. This would also be mutually beneficial regarding funding as potential grantors will see collaboration (something they highly favor, especially from different agencies and even levels of government).

This symposium has opened discussions we have had for years, but we will be able to make the connections this time. The work conducted by our research partners and government partners is essential to the communities in the North Slope Borough, and we want to make sure that researchers and communities can bridge that gap and move forward for the preservation of our communities in the North Slope Borough.