



MEDIA RELEASE

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RELEASE DATE: February 27, 2004 — For Immediate Release Dawn Roberts, 451-5020

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION FUNDS ALASKAN MapTEACH GEOSCIENCES EDUCATION PROJECT

ALASKA PROJECT ONE OF THIRTEEN SELECTED FOR FUNDING NATIONWIDE

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded funding under the Information Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) program to the collaborative project, “*Place-Based Geospatial Science Learning and Applications in Rural Alaska.*” The ITEST program is designed to increase opportunities for students and teachers to learn about and use information technologies (IT) within the context of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and is anticipated to be an important tool in IT workforce development. The program supports both youth-based projects with strong emphases on career and educational paths, and comprehensive projects for students and teachers.

More than 300 pre-proposals were submitted nationwide to the ITEST program, of which 126 were selected for full proposals, and of those only 13, including the Alaska project, were selected for funding. The Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys (DGGs), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Geography Department, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison Environmental Remote Sensing Center (ERSC) will work together to develop the pilot program *Mapping Technology Experiences with Alaska’s Cultural Heritage*, or MapTEACH (<http://www.mapteach.org>).

With the support of 10 partner organizations (including private sector, nonprofit, and educational institutions), the 3-year MapTEACH project will develop a place-based educational program for middle- and high-school students in Alaska that emphasizes hands-on experience with spatial technology (GPS, GIS, and remote sensing imagery in a local landscape–landform context) in conjunction with traditional activities. It will draw upon the combined expertise of teachers,

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education researchers, remote sensing specialists, geoscience professionals, Native Elders, and others with traditions-based knowledge, and will be piloted in the Minto, Nenana, Nome, and Fairbanks areas. Participants will work directly with DGGs geologists, and will be presented with a chance to authentically emulate scientific activities at a novice level, using real data in a real-world setting. Concurrently, DGGs will learn to incorporate education and outreach into its geological practices when working in rural Alaskan communities.

MapTEACH will be implemented in two separate but content-equivalent formats to meet the unique requirements of reaching students in rural Alaska. Students serviced by centralized school districts will take part in a 9-week (standard school quarter), after-school, classroom-based curriculum that will culminate in a 7-day summer Capstone Field Experience during which students and teachers will interact in a field camp setting with Native Elders, traditions-based community leaders, and professional geologists from DGGs. Other, more geographically dispersed students will be brought together in Intensive Studies Institutes at established living-learning facilities for two weeks of full-time classroom instruction, followed by a 7-day Capstone Field Experience.

Introducing students, their families, and their communities to geoscience and geospatial technology in a stimulating field setting will enhance public understanding of the role of natural resources in developing viable economies for rural Alaska and foster informed management practices. At the same time, incorporating cultural knowledge into IT-intensive studies will serve as a bridge between old and new perspectives on the natural landscape and highlight the continued relevance of traditional teachings in the modern world.

Supporting partner organizations currently include the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network/Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, the Cultural Heritage and Education Institute (CHEI), Fort Knox Gold Mine, Lighthouse Community Christian School, Minto School, Nenana City Public Schools, Nome City Schools, the Northwest Alaska Career and Technical Center, and Sitnasuak Native Corporation.

For more information on MapTEACH contact DGGs, 3354 College Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 (907-451-5020), the UAF Geography Department, P.O. Box 755840, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775 (907-474-7494), or the Environmental Remote Sensing Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1225 W. Dayton Street, Floor 12, Madison, Wisconsin 53706 (608-262-1585).

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