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# Covid-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Document

## Knowledge gaps and areas for potential action in the Arctic Council

### Knowledge gap or potential action area

Section of the briefing document or gap from other identified category:

Potential action areas and knowledge gaps relevant for ACAP's work:

2.5) Impacts on knowledge production (*Explore new methods to enhance virtual access, data sharing and harmonization across research projects and activities. and Facilitate involvement through virtual tool and creative solutions for meetings and engagement, including facilitating the participation of persons in connectivity-challenged Arctic communities and community-based participatory research.*)

2.7) Enabling public infrastructure (*Increase community capacity to identify and test new water, waste management, energy and housing solutions that meet their needs.*)

Does the Arctic Council have an ongoing project on or related to a given knowledge gap or action area?

**Name of project and WG/EG:** Kola Waste project; ACAP WG

**Work plan year:** Not in the Workplans, but has been implemented in 2018-2020.

**How does this project address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?**

ACAP's Kola Waste project addresses gap 2.7 (Enabling public infrastructure). The goal of this Sámi Council lead project is to identify, make an inventory of and clean-up unauthorized waste dumps in the Sámi territory of the Murmansk region. As a result of this project, a total of 30 tons of waste (20% - plastic) and 3 tons of scrap metal were removed, disposed of and the areas were reclaimed. The project now feeds into a new project proposal aimed at developing environmentally sound solid waste management in remote Arctic communities (see description below).



## Can an existing project address this issue?

**Name of project and WG/EG:** Solid Waste Management in Remote Arctic Communities; ACAP and SDWG WGs

**Work plan year:** 2019-2021 – under development. When the PSI application is approved, it will be included in 2021-2023 Workplan

**How does this project address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?**

This project addresses gap 2.7 (Enabling public infrastructure). To be more specific, it will increase community capacity to identify and test the best waste management solutions that meet their needs.

Across the Arctic, there are countless uncontrolled open solid waste dumpsites contributing to water, land and air pollution. They contain various waste components that are unsorted: municipal solid waste, hazardous, and organic waste. Open dumpsites pose a wide range of hazards to local communities including illegal dumping of waste, uncontrolled burning and seepage into water bodies. Linkages have been made between exposure and human health in communities lacking infrastructure, and where there is a self-haul system with many community actors accessing the landfill. Often lacking an operator, systematized collection and access to cover materials, management is further hampered by erosion and melting permafrost, limiting access and control of sites. Indigenous communities face acute health and environmental impacts from these open dumpsites.

The project seeks to cooperate with Indigenous Leaders, local, regional, and national governments, community leaders and solid waste management experts, to leverage available resources and scale up best practices that contribute to resilient and healthier Arctic communities. This umbrella project seeks to provide a number of physical and online resources to address the unique needs of Arctic communities, from planning to implementation of solid waste management practices. Infrastructure improvements and in-community education including training on maintenance operation for these improvements are both of high priority. Coordination with local solid waste management liaisons is crucial to retain a strong and respected field presence with local communities throughout this project. Many issues continue to be exacerbated due to COVID-19 impacts. Communities have found new ways of doing things to manage solid waste while keeping local workers and community members safe during COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides addressing one of the issues that can be seen as a preventive measure to reduce the risk of a pandemic in the Arctic, the developers of the project also took into account some planning elements related to COVID-19 precautions and procedures when drafting the final project proposal.

For example, the Nome area Tribes have received funding from the United States to resume recycling and backhaul of wastes with specific elements related to COVID precautions and procedures to protect community members and operators. Moreover, now the project has a more flexible timeline due to the current global COVID-19 crisis which is severely limiting travel.



## Could an ongoing project be adjusted?

**Name of project and WG/EG:** Community-Based Black Carbon and Public Health Assessment, ACAP WG

**Work plan year:** 2019-2021 – development and refining of the project proposal. When the PSI application is approved, it will be included in 2021-2023 Workplan

**How would this project address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?**

This AIA-led project will address gap 2.5 (Impacts on knowledge production) and it is a good example of how all new project proposals could be adjusted to meet new requirements imposed by the COVID-19 situation.

Arctic governments have performed limited assessments of local black carbon emissions or the risks to public health that these emissions are posing in the Arctic context. At the same time, local communities generally lack the capacity to make detailed assessments of black carbon emissions, their public health impacts and mitigation options. Phase 2 of the Community-Based Black Carbon and Public Health Assessment project will aim to demonstrate methods of preventing and mitigating air quality contamination from black carbon emissions while also protecting public health.

The project proposal mentions COVID-19 as one of potential implementation risks and suggests to establish and maintain at all times COVID-19-smart project planning and implementation approach: *“COVID-19: The coronavirus adds considerable complexity and unpredictability to project planning and implementation. At the time of writing, it appears that field work inside Russia is viable and recommended by national experts. The ability to conduct field work in Alaska is less clear and more situational. The Project will monitor developments closely and is fully committed to using remote and other least-risk, COVID-smart best practices and precautions. The Project will not prioritize work over health and safety”*.

Moreover, when describing project activities, the project lead sets the following rules for all project participants:

- For the health and safety of all project participants, partners and community members the project team will observe and encourage the use of best practices for prevention of COVID-19 spreading. This will include the use of personal protective equipment and social distancing,
- The team will respect the local and tribal mandates put forth by each community, discuss in advance any and all proposed contacts with community and tribal members and plan activities accordingly.
- To the greatest extent possible, the project team will conduct activities remotely and use available technologies and applications to avoid unnecessary personal contact.



### Is a new project needed?

Name of project and WG/EG:

Work plan year:

How would this project address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?

### Could all envisioned projects be placed under any of the WGs or might a new Task Force (other type of subsidiary body) be needed to address a particular area?

Please provide specific details on the suggested Task Force or other subsidiary body:

How would this new body address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?

### Is there work related to Covid-19 in the Arctic that is not captured in the compiled list that should also be considered?

Please provide specific details on the work needed:

Which Arctic Council body would be responsible for the task(s)?

How would this address Covid-19 in the Arctic or pandemics in the Arctic?



Questions or comments