

Stellar Group
Research | Strategy | Impact

The Alliance

FISCAL YEAR 2023 ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
About this Report	3
Key Findings	5
Non-linear and Iterative	5
Intentional Adaptation	7
Creating More Possibilities	9
Interdependence and Decentralization	11
Resilience and Transformative Justice	15
Fractal	18
Recommendations	20

List of Figures Used

Figure 1: Almost one-quarter of Alliance members are from Anchorage/Mat-Su	16
Figure 2: Racial demographics of Alliance members closely mirror statewide demographics	17
Figure 3: Female-identifying people are disproportionately represented in the Alliance	17

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide	22
-----------------------------------	-----------



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alliance is a statewide network that seeks to reduce alcohol misuse and related harms in Alaska. The network is comprised of individuals and organizations that are personally and professionally committed to addressing this complex issue through a systems-level approach.

The Alliance was initiated in 2019 through a three-year Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention & Early Intervention grant awarded to Recover Alaska by the Alaska Department of Health Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). The grant, which has been extended through fiscal year (FY) 2024, is to coordinate a statewide alcohol prevention network. The network's mission is *to engage people and communities as partners, to promote individual and community wellness, and prevent excessive alcohol use and harms in Alaska.*

To achieve its mission, the Alliance works towards three goals:

1. *Build relationships among and across organizations, efforts, communities, and individuals.*
2. *Build shared meaning about the nature of alcohol misuse, upstream prevention, and community wellness.*
3. *Build power for everyone to have what they need to thrive and contribute to the mission, based on where they are and where they sense to go.*

The structure of the Alliance includes a backbone support team comprised of Recover Alaska staff and contractors who support meeting facilitation and completion of various network activities, Regional Co-Chairs representing the public health regions of the state, and a broader membership. The Alliance is also developing new member roles including Network Weavers, Evaluation Liaison, and Regional Co-Chair Builder. These new roles, as well as Regional Co-Chairs, will receive an annual stipend for their work. The network has a current membership of 172 individuals, some of whom represent an organization. Membership is defined as being on the Alliance listserv. Alliance contractors are also considered members of the Alliance.

Members engage in the Alliance via the monthly newsletter, by participating in workgroup meetings, and by attending bi-monthly Integration Sessions. Integration Sessions are member-wide meetings with an open-space structure in which members can propose discussion topics for break-out rooms from which others can select to join.

All workgroups are open to any interested members, with the exception of the Transforming Conflict workgroup, which had a closed group of six members. Unlike other workgroups, the Transforming Conflict workgroup had a fixed timeline and ended in FY 2023. In addition, the Alliance occasionally hosts other meetings such as professional development workshops and open member meetings on specific topics such as input on a new youth alcohol prevention campaign.

FISCAL YEAR 2023 ALLIANCE EVALUATION

The FY 2023 evaluation report explores the Alliance's structure, processes, and member experiences, as well as updates on prior evaluations' recommendations and findings. The Alliance evaluation is developmental in nature and was led by Stellar Group, the evaluation team for the Alliance, with significant input from the Evaluation & Learning Workgroup.

The evaluation questions guiding this report are:

1. *Is the Alliance meeting expectations within member experiences? (as defined by the Alliance Community Expectations listed on page 7)*
2. *How is sustainability fostered in the Alliance?*
3. *What impacts are resulting from the Alliance for its members?*

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation draws primarily on interview data as well as review of network documents. Members' demographic data was also pulled from the Knack online platform. Interviews were conducted using a peer interview process hosted by Stellar Group in April and May of 2023. Interview transcripts were then analyzed by Stellar Group using Dedoose analysis software. A total of 21 individuals participated in the peer interviews. This sample accounts for 12% of the total membership, and 27% of the currently active members (based on Knack meeting sign-in data). A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings for this report are explored within the six elements of Emergent Strategy, one of the key frameworks used by the Alliance. Emergent Strategy, developed by adrienne maree brown, is a way of "building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions" and refers to "how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for."¹ The six elements of Emergent Strategy are: non-linear and iterative, intentional adaptation, creating more possibilities, interdependence and decentralization, resilience and transformative justice, and fractal.

NON-LINEAR AND ITERATIVE

The Alliance continually tests out new ideas that arise out of discussions and makes adjustments as needed. Members can propose ideas for activities or initiatives at any time and engage with others to decide whether, and how, to pursue them. While members appreciate this approach, it is also sometimes a "messy" process which leads to a lack of clarity for members as to how day-to-day discussion and activities relate back to the overarching purpose of the Alliance.

Many members continue to express that despite the several foundational documents that the Alliance has developed, there is still no clear, succinct explanation of the roles and

responsibilities of members or how the Alliance works towards goals. This can pose an obstacle for members (particularly newer members) in knowing how to engage in the network, as well as how to invite others to join. In response to this feedback, the Alliance developed an ad hoc Network Mapping Workgroup to clarify the structure and general functioning which is still in process at the time of this report.

INTENTIONAL ADAPTATION

As part of the Alliance's non-linear and iterative approach, adjustments and adaptations are continually made as needed to better serve members and work towards shared goals. This year, the Alliance adapted some of its workgroup structure and processes based on member feedback. One example was merging Strategy & Organizational Design workgroups. In addition, new tools have been introduced. The Alliance began using Knack online software to track member demographics as well as participation in meetings. Currently, 45% of Alliance members have a Knack profile.

Two new initiatives have been developed in order to take advantage of new funding: a social marketing campaign to reduce underage alcohol consumption, and the Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium, in response to new funding opportunities. This marks a shift in the network from more internally focused efforts to externally facing, shared projects.

CREATING MORE POSSIBILITIES

Members find the Alliance's focus on relationship building, connecting with others, and creating space for a person to show up as their whole selves to be unique in the prevention field, and highly beneficial to creating new ways of working together, addressing challenges, and thinking about prevention and wellness. For some members, however, there is a lack of clarity as to how this approach connects to network goals. For example, some noted that words like 'alcohol' and 'misuse' rarely, if ever, come up, which to them illustrates a disconnection from the central goals of the network. This has been an ongoing tension across fiscal years.

As part of its goal to build relationships, the Alliance also aims to engage members beyond those who work in prevention roles. While there is no formal process or strategy in place for outreach, any member can invite someone to join the Alliance at any time. There is currently no system in place to track membership within these categories in order to determine how well this is being achieved.

Further, there has been some ongoing conversation within the network of exploring alternative funding options in order to support network sustainability. Some suggested ideas include a paid membership option or requesting financial support from members. The difference between a member representing an organization and one who attends as an individual is an important equity consideration in how member-supported funding should be

approached. While an organization may be more able to provide funding, this may present a barrier for individuals to become members.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND DECENTRALIZATION

The Alliance's organizational structure is purposefully decentralized in order to remove typical working hierarchies and create a more interdependent and egalitarian space for members to engage with one another. The use of consent-based decision making also serves to help generate more shared leadership and power across the network. Members spoke highly of this approach. However, in actual practice there are some decisions made outside of this model and members voiced varying levels of familiarity with this reality. Due to the decentralized nature and some internal communications challenges, it can be difficult for members to trace back how a decision was made.

In recent years, there has been ongoing discussion in the Alliance to increase member leadership and depend less on contractors. To this end, several new member roles, including Network Weavers, were developed in this past year. One Network Weaver role is filled by a contractor, which brings to question the distinction between contractor and member roles. Two significant challenges the Alliance has continued to face are members' limited capacity to engage and the length of time it takes for new members to get oriented.

RESILIENCE AND TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

The Alliance's approach to transformative justice focuses on creating positive changes in relationships and mental models that influence how individuals work within the prevention landscape, as well as center equity in discussions and shared work. Internally, this includes increasing representation from the geographic and cultural communities across the state, and creating meeting spaces that are inclusive. In FY 2023, membership has diversified in terms of regional representation although racial demographics of Alliance members continue to be heavily weighted to White-identifying individuals. Women also continue to make up the majority of members.

The Transforming Conflict Workgroup educational meetings had the purpose of supporting conflict resolution within the Alliance, and helping members gain skills in handling conflict outside of the network in their personal and professional lives. Learning about conflict resolution is intended to support relationship change, one of the three levels of structural change within the Systems Change framework and also supports the goal of building relationships.

FRACTAL

The Alliance is fractal in that members learn and engage in shared topics, and then bring these new ideas and approaches into other spaces across the state and prevention field. Similarly, members can bring new ideas and insights into Alliance meetings, creating a continuous feedback loop of sharing and growth.

Examples shared by members of impacts on their professional lives that were shared during interviews include bringing consent-based decision making into other spaces, being intentional with check-in's, hosting town halls and local radio shows, and sharing resources. In addition, some members spoke of personal impacts such as applying better self-care, working on decreasing their sense of urgency and productivity mindset, and learning new skills and information they can use in other areas of their life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alliance provides a space for members to explore new ways of working and interacting within the field of prevention, and all members spoke highly of their experience within the network. Many members believe the Alliance has an opportunity to create significant impacts within the state through this novel approach. However, like any network, members also face challenges such as being unclear of the central purpose of the network, how day-to-day actions connect to the network's goals, and their own roles and responsibilities. Based on the findings explored in this report, the following recommendations have been made to further strengthen the Alliance in meeting its mission.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Continue to strengthen internal communications

The Alliance has made efforts in the past year to increase internal communications. However, members still express some lack of clarity about how the network works towards its goals, how to get involved, and how decisions are made. There are many possibilities for how internal communications could be further strengthened. For example, workgroup meeting minutes could be saved in a central file that all members have access to (and are regularly made aware of), quarterly reporting could be structured to create more clarity on recent major decisions, or Integration Sessions could include a network update component. Interview participants also gave some suggestions on how to support member leadership (as described on page 15).

RECOMMENDATION 2: Create onboarding processes for new members

New members continue to express confusion about the Alliance's structure, processes, and how to engage. As a result, new members are often less engaged in activities and decision making and may not continue to engage in meetings. Members have proposed several ideas for how to support new members in onboarding but none have yet come to fruition. This includes the member agreement (#6) to create peer mentors for new members, onboarding

videos, and regularly held new member meetings. It would be valuable for the Alliance to dedicate time and attention to this area, particularly as the network continues to recruit new members and promote the network across the state.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Clarify how activities in the Alliance connect to overarching goals

There continues to be differing levels of understanding among members as to how day-to-day activities of the Alliance support the achievement of identified goals. Relatedly, while some members believe “the network is the strategy” others ask when the network will engage in more direct strategies/activities to achieve goals. It may be beneficial for the Alliance to hold group discussions to clarify the network’s purpose and intended outcomes in order to reach a mutual understanding. Creating a shared document that details the Alliance’s theory of change can also help increase clarity and provide an easy reference for members.

INTRODUCTION

The Alliance is a statewide network that seeks to reduce alcohol misuse and related harms in Alaska. The network is comprised of individuals and organizations that are personally and professionally committed to addressing this complex issue through a systems-level approach.

The Alliance was formed in 2019 through a three-year Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention & Early Intervention grant awarded to Recover Alaska by the Alaska Department of Health Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). The grant has since been extended through fiscal year (FY) 2024. The Alliance's mission is *to engage people and communities as partners, to promote individual and community wellness, and prevent excessive alcohol use and harms in Alaska.*

To achieve its mission, the Alliance works towards three goals:

1. *Build relationships among and across organizations, efforts, communities, and individuals.*
2. *Build shared meaning about the nature of alcohol misuse, upstream prevention, and community wellness.*
3. *Build power for everyone to have what they need to thrive and contribute to the mission, based on where they are and where they sense to go.*

The Alliance's efforts are guided by six frameworks. Additional guiding frameworks can be introduced at any time by members.

- » **Strategic Prevention Framework:** Created by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this framework supports groups that work to address substance abuse and related behavioral health issues through five steps (capacity, planning, implementation, evaluation, and assessment) and is guided by principles of sustainability and cultural competence.
- » **Emergent Strategy:** Based on a book by adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy is a framework to help groups and organizations grow capacity for radical transformation. It is comprised of six interrelated core elements: non-linear and iterative, adaptive, creating more possibilities, resilience and transformative justice, interdependence and decentralization, and fractal. This report is organized around those core elements.
- » **Collective Impact:** Created by John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG, Collective Impact is a framework used by networks and other groups to learn together and align and integrate their actions to achieve population and systems-level change. There are five conditions of Collective Impact: a common agenda, shared measures, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization. Equity is centered within each of the conditions.
- » **Cynefin:** Designed by Dave Snowden to assist in decision making by identifying circumstance and uncertainty, the Cynefin framework outlines five situational domains that decisions may fall within: complex, complicated, chaos, simple, and disorder.

- » **Upstream Prevention:** This framework proposes to look upstream at why issues come into being in the first place by addressing shared risk and protective factors. This was first expressed in the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion by the World Health Organization and captured the shift in focus from individual risk factors and behaviors to the societal conditions that keep people healthy, such as adequate income, meaningful work, education, community connection, decent housing, and healthy food.
- » **Systems Change:** Detailed in the 2018 book, *The Water of Systems Change*, by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, this framework includes six conditions of systems change at three different levels. Structural change includes policies, practices, and resource flows. Relational change includes relationships & connections, and power dynamics. Transformative change involves mental models.

The structure of the Alliance includes a backbone support team (as called for in the Collective Impact framework) comprised of a Network Coordinator and eight contractors (representing four firms) who facilitate workgroups and support various network activities such as internal and external communications and network evaluation. The Network Coordinator is a paid staff member of Recover Alaska. In addition, the Alliance has Regional Co-Chairs representing the Alaska public health regions, as defined by the Alaska Department of Health: Anchorage, Gulf Coast, Interior, Mat-Su, Northern, Southeast, and Southwest. In the Interior, Northern, and Southwest regions there are two Regional Co-Chair positions to increase representation. Each Regional Co-Chair receives a stipend for their role, ranging from \$5,000-\$8,750 annually. Compensation amounts vary to account for differences in the cost of living between regions. As discussed in more detail in this report, the Alliance is also developing new member roles including Network Weavers, Evaluation Liaison, and Regional Co-Chair Builder. The individuals in these new roles will also receive an annual stipend for their work.

The network has grown significantly since it first began, with a current membership of 172 individuals. Membership is defined as being on the Alliance listserv. Some members may be more directly involved in Alliance meetings and activities while others may only engage by reading the monthly newsletter and other email announcements. Alliance contractors are also considered members of the Alliance.

All workgroups are open to any interested members, with the exception of the Transforming Conflict workgroup, which had a closed group of six members who each received a \$1,000 stipend for their mental and emotional labor. Unlike other workgroups, the Transforming Conflict workgroup had a fixed timeline and ended in FY 2023.

In FY 2023 Alliance had six workgroups:

1. *Communications/Social Norms*
2. *Data & Learning*
3. *Evaluation & Learning*
4. *Network Mapping (ad hoc)*

5. *Strategy Design*
6. *Transforming Conflict*

Workgroups meet on a monthly basis. In general, about five to 10 members participate in a given workgroup meeting. Some members participate in more than one workgroup.

In addition, the Alliance occasionally hosts other events such as professional development workshops and meetings on specific topics such as open member meetings for input on a youth alcohol prevention campaign. On average, members spend about 3-4 hours per month in Alliance meetings. Contractors and Recover Alaska staff spend more time in meetings, in some quarters about twice as much as members. This does not include additional work done outside of meeting spaces.

Pursuant to its first goal, the Alliance puts significant emphasis on developing relationships among members and creating inclusive environments. The Alliance makes an effort to create spaces for members to connect with and learn from one another, while also focusing discussions on health and prevention.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The FY 2023 evaluation report explores the Alliance's structure, processes, and member experiences. The Alliance evaluation is developmental in nature and was led by Stellar Group, the evaluation team for the Alliance. The Evaluation & Learning Workgroup played a significant role in defining evaluation questions and methods.

The evaluation questions guiding this report are:

1. *Is the Alliance meeting expectations within member experiences? (as defined by the Alliance Community Expectations listed on page 7)*
2. *How is sustainability fostered in the Alliance?*
3. *What impacts are resulting from the Alliance for its members?*

This report explores these questions primarily through the lens of the Emergent Strategy framework. In 2021, the Alliance explored how the six elements of this framework showed up in the then nascent network in the [Emergent Strategies](#) report. This report explores how those elements show up within the Alliance's work currently, as it has continued to mature.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation draws primarily on interview data as well as a review of network documents such as quarterly reports, workgroup meeting minutes, and the Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium survey summary. Members' demographic data is from the Knack online platform to understand representation in the network. Interviews were conducted using a peer interview process hosted by Stellar Group in April and May of 2023. In these online Zoom

sessions, members, contractors, and Recover Alaska staff joined into pairs and interviewed each other using a guide developed by the Evaluation & Learning Workgroup. Recordings of the peer interviews were uploaded to a shared Google Drive and later transcribed and analyzed by Stellar Group using Dedoose analysis software. A total of 21 individuals participated in the peer interviews. This sample accounts for 12% of the total membership, and 27% of the currently active members (based on Knack meeting sign-in data). A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

KEY FINDINGS

The Alliance can be described as being in a continual process of emergence. Emergent Strategy, developed by adrienne maree brown, is a way of “building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions” and refers to “how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.”² This section explores the Alliance through the six core elements of Emergent Strategy:

- » *Non-linear and iterative*
- » *Intentional adaptation*
- » *Creating more possibilities*
- » *Interdependence and decentralization*
- » *Resilience and transformative justice*
- » *Fractal*

These six elements are inherently overlapping and interconnected in both theory and practice. For example, efforts to create more interdependence and decentralization in the past year are also a part of the intentional adaptation of the Alliance.

In its first four years, the majority of the Alliance’s efforts have been focused on developing foundational structures, processes, and guiding documents within the network such as a Common Agenda, Alliance website, New Member Orientation Packet, and Workgroup Charters. In FY 2023, there has been a notable shift towards exploring and engaging in externally focused work as well.

NON-LINEAR AND ITERATIVE

“Transformation doesn’t happen in a linear way, at least not one we can always track. It happens in cycles, convergences, explosions. If we release the framework of failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this?” - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

The Alliance functions in an inherently non-linear and iterative manner; the network continually tests out new ideas that arise out of discussions and makes adjustments as needed. Illustrating this, the Alliance does not have a logic model or strategic plan to dictate its activities. Rather, members can propose ideas for activities or initiatives towards shared goals at any time, engage with others to decide whether to pursue these ideas, and discuss if any modifications may be necessary. These can include anything from considering a new proposed shared activity to proposing a change in language in existing documents.

"[Emergent Strategy] is a lot more messy and it's a lot less clear, but there's more opportunity for people to step forward into deciding what the answer is going to be, which is a different way of being. I think that over time we as a group have gotten more comfortable with that." - Alliance member

Many members see benefits to this iterative approach. It allows space for new ideas and opportunities to emerge and provides opportunities for members to reflect and give input on how shared work and network structure can be adjusted to streamline processes or address equity considerations. However, this complex approach can sometimes get messy and pose a challenge for some members in actively participating in Alliance work and decisions. During peer interviews, some members spoke about a lack of clarity as to how day-to-day discussions and activities relate to the overarching purpose of the Alliance. One member explained, *"I feel like everyone's coming to a meeting with a different familiarity ...and it doesn't always feel like we're on the same page or all of us really know what the goals are. It takes some time and familiarity."*

This range of familiarity is in part a result of the changing attendance at meetings - while members tend to participate in the same workgroup meetings over time, anyone can join a group at any time, and members may sometimes miss meetings. It is also related to the growth of the network. While some members have been involved in various workgroups and meetings for years, others in the same conversation may only have attended a few meetings. As a result, some may be more familiar with a topic of discussion and history leading up to the current conversation while others may not have this context.

CLARIFYING THE NETWORK PURPOSE AND ROLES

The Alliance has been continually working to clarify the purpose and processes of the network for members. Past and current feedback from members has indicated that despite the numerous foundational documents that the Alliance has developed, there is still no clear, succinct explanation of how the Alliance works to accomplish its goals, and what the roles and responsibilities of members, contractors, and staff are in supporting achievement of network goals. This can pose an obstacle for many members (particularly newer members) in understanding how to engage or how to invite others to join. Even for more engaged members like Regional Co-Chairs, there is some challenge in explaining what it is the Alliance does. As one person summarized, *"There's been too many words and too many documents...And people just really want to know, what is the Alliance and what are we doing?"*

Recently, the Alliance developed an ad hoc Network Mapping Workgroup to clarify the structure and general functioning. This workgroup formed during the December Retreat in response to the previous year's evaluation recommendation to clarify this information. The workgroup is creating an infographic that illustrates how the different components of the

network (workgroups, Regional Co-Chairs, etc.) work together, as well as how activities and initiatives are developed and implemented. This workgroup also plans to revise the New Member Orientation Packet to clarify roles and responsibilities and simplify language. The broader network has also discussed revising the Common Agenda - which outlines the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the network - to reduce jargon and clarify messaging about the core purpose. However, there is no workgroup tasked with this work at this time.

Community Expectations

During the 2022 December retreat, the Transforming Conflict Workgroup presented six new Alliance Community Expectations:

1. *Cultivate a community of shared alignment towards forwarding the Alliance's goals.*
2. *Continue to use consent-based decision making to create a network community within boundaries defined in the Common Agenda and the decision-making protocols.*
3. *Transparent and timely communication that are responsive to members' needs and communication styles.*
4. *Coordinate the network in a way that supports member leadership.*
5. *Communicate about who holds decision making power on which decisions, and what decisions are being made, through monthly newsletter and/or bi-monthly meetings.*
6. *Pair new members with peer mentors to orient members with existing processes.*

Since the adoption of these Expectations at the December Retreat, the Alliance has not explicitly discussed them in other meeting spaces, and it is unclear who holds responsibility for ensuring their implementation. This is particularly true given that the Transforming Conflict Workgroup, which created the list, is no longer meeting. As discussed throughout this report, these expectations are currently implemented to varying degrees in the network.

INTENTIONAL ADAPTATION

"adaptation: a change in a plant or animal that makes it better able to live in a particular place or situation; the process of changing to fit some purpose or situation: the process of adapting

"intention: the thing that you plan to do or achieve: an aim or purpose" - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

As part of the Alliance's non-linear and iterative approach, adjustments and adaptations are continually made as needed to better serve members and work towards shared goals. In the past year, the Alliance has adapted some of its structure and processes based on member feedback, such as the development of the ad hoc Network Mapping Workgroup discussed above. In addition, the Strategy and Organizational Design workgroups merged to become the Strategy Design Workgroup, due to the overlapping nature of the two groups, with the hopes that this will increase cohesion and ease decision making. The Transforming Conflict

Workgroup was created at the end of FY 2022 to define conflict resolution processes within the network. Unlike other workgroups, Recover Alaska staff and the contractors hired to lead this workgroup decided to make it closed to a set group of members due to the sensitive nature of the shared work, a shift from the typical open style of workgroups. The workgroup also hosted education and wellness meetings that were open to the broader membership to discuss topics related to conflict resolution.

RESPONDING TO NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2022, additional, short-term federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) became available for the Alliance's use. To determine how to use the funding, the Alliance hosted a series of meetings with staff from the State of Alaska Department of Health and Recover Alaska along with members of the Alliance to explore options within the parameters of the available funds. The Alliance elected to take on two new projects, including a social norms campaign to address youth alcohol consumption and the first Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium. These two projects mark a shift in the Alliance, moving into more outward-facing shared group activities as opposed to having a central focus on network development.

"The Symposium was just incredible, and it's the first big thing the Alliance ever really did besides form itself. And we have momentum and people are starting to see us." - Alliance member

Social Norms Campaign

Of the ARPA funds available to the Alliance, \$324,536 was used to implement a social norms campaign to reduce underage alcohol consumption in the state. To support this new project, an ad hoc Social Norms Workgroup was created, merging with the Communications Workgroup, to create a decision-making space for members. Originally scheduled to end in March 2023, the funding was extended an additional year in order to amend the campaign plan for social marketing best practices. After completing initial start-up and research, the campaign is expected to begin in July 2023 and will be monitored and evaluated by the communications contractor and workgroup to determine impact. One challenge has been the low participation among members in this workgroup, a consistent challenge across all workgroups.

Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium

In February 2023, the Alliance hosted the Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium, a free event for all interested individuals, whether a provider in the prevention field, a researcher, or an interested community member/individual with lived experience. The event was held in-person in Anchorage and had a total of 133 attendees (including 38 presenters). The purpose of the Symposium was to discuss topics related to wellness, celebrate the work

being done in the prevention field, and engage in group wellness activities and practices. The Symposium was developed by an ad hoc Symposium Planning workgroup within the Alliance and several members also facilitated the event. In a post-Symposium survey, attendees spoke positively of their experiences, though some noted that they were anticipating sessions that provided information and skill-building they can apply in the field, rather than a focus on self-care. The agenda was not publicized until a short time before the event took place, and there were also conflicting versions of the agenda distributed in different formats. In addition, several survey respondents noted that they wanted more description of the session topics to inform their decisions of which to attend. Like other Alliance events and meetings, clarifying meaning, approach, and purpose would be helpful for attendees to set expectations and make informed decisions about their participation.

UNDERSTANDING MEMBERSHIP REPRESENTATION

In response to a recommendation from the FY 2022 annual evaluation, the Alliance implemented a systematic way to track member demographics. This recommendation was made to meet grant reporting requirements as well as provide a clear understanding of the diversity and representation among members, an important consideration in the network's focus on equity and inclusion. In FY 2023, the Alliance began using Knack for this purpose. In Knack, members create profiles with a few pieces of demographic information, and then check in to Alliance meetings through the online portal. In addition to providing demographic information, Knack also tracks meeting attendance.

One caveat to Knack is that profiles are self-created; therefore, Knack only captures members who attend meetings where they are invited to create a profile. Currently, 45% of all Alliance members have Knack profiles. This provides some insight into the degree of participation that the full membership has in Alliance meetings and events.

CREATING MORE POSSIBILITIES

"The word "strategy" is a military term, which means a plan of action towards a goal. I want to really emphasize the "a"s in that sentence—there is a practice of narrowing down, identifying one path forward, one strategy, one way, one agenda, one leader, one set of values, etc. ... In my observations of the natural world, there are examples of scale that offer another way—when we think about snowflakes, grains of sand, waves in water, stars—there is evidence that many possibilities exist for how we manifest inside our potential." - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

One aspect of the Alliance that members find unique in the prevention field is the network's focus on relationship building, connecting with others, and creating space for a person to show up as their whole, authentic selves. For example, check-ins at the beginning of meetings take on a tone of genuine sharing and support, and depending on what comes up this can influence the agenda for the remainder of the meeting. Relationship building is one

of the goals of the Alliance. Members see this as a central strength of the Alliance. One member explained how this focus connects to Alliance's goals, stating:

For me, part of it is making sure to take care of people who are doing prevention work.... Often those jobs are underfunded and overworked, and we really need to maintain the health and wellbeing of those people to be able to keep doing that work and to make sure they have the resources they need. So, part of it is tending to each other.

This person-centered perspective, which tends to individuals who are working within prevention roles or have a personal commitment to substance misuse prevention, encourages new ways of working together, addressing challenges, and thinking about prevention and wellness. For some members, however, there is a lack of clarity as to how this relationship-centered, holistic approach connects to the goals of the Alliance. For example, a couple of members noted that words like 'alcohol' and 'misuse' rarely, if ever, come up, which to them illustrates a disconnection from the central goals of the network. Many interviewed members spoke to an ongoing sense of confusion and uncertainty about how to engage in the Alliance, even if they are already attending workgroup meetings. This confusion creates lost opportunities for drawing on the insights and ideas of members and may cause members to discontinue participation potentially impacting network sustainability.

During peer interviews, several members spoke of an ongoing lack of clarity about how the Alliance works towards its goals either for themselves individually or that they see among other members in the network. For example, there remains an ongoing tension among members where some subscribe to the notion that "the network is the strategy" while others continue to call for more direct action and shared efforts to achieve the network's goals. As one member shared, "I feel a little bit like we have these meetings and we do talk about things, but rarely, if ever, does anything get done." Further, some members said they believe there is shared agreement about how the Alliance forwards its goals, while others said there is not, illustrating a disconnect in member experiences and perspectives.

ENGAGING COMMUNITY

As part of its goal to build relationships, the Alliance aims to engage individuals across the state beyond those who work in prevention roles, such as organizations who provide other community-based services, and passionate community members whose jobs are not related to prevention. This approach removes the separation of 'community member' and 'expert' and treats all individuals as equally qualified to weigh in on discussions and decisions, share stories and experiences, and learn from one another. While there is no formal process or strategy in place for outreach, any member can invite someone to join the Alliance at any time.

"To me, the main strength of the Alliance is it brings people in and allows people to exist in this space for more reasons than just professional, than just prevention-oriented, or more reasons than just personal." - Alliance member

Currently, there is no mechanism in place to track membership within these categories in order to determine how well this is being achieved. Some members have noted that Alliance meetings take place during regular business hours, which means those whose job is not directly related are less likely to be able to attend. There are also equity considerations of who participates through their job and therefore is compensated for their participation, and who is not.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND DECENTRALIZATION

"The idea of interdependence is that we can meet each other's needs in a variety of ways, that we can truly lean on others and they can lean on us. It means we have to decentralize our idea of where solutions and decisions happen, where ideas come from." - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

The Alliance's organizational structure is purposefully decentralized in order to remove typical working hierarchies and create a more interdependent and egalitarian space for members to engage with one another. The decentralized structure fosters shared decision making and distributes power throughout the membership. For example, workgroups are open to any interested members (with the exception of the Transforming Conflict Workgroup) and serve as decision making spaces. There have also been recent efforts to develop member leadership roles to help spread out responsibilities, such as meeting facilitation and workgroup coordination, across the membership and reduce dependence on contractors.

DECISION MAKING AND POWER

Within workgroups, the network uses consent-based decision making to generate shared leadership and power among network members. Consent-based decision-making removes 'majority rules' practices and focuses on ensuring that all decisions are within members' range of tolerance. A decision is only made when it is within the range of tolerance for all members present during the discussion. For the Alliance, decisions are iterative and can always be revisited if a new concern or information arises.

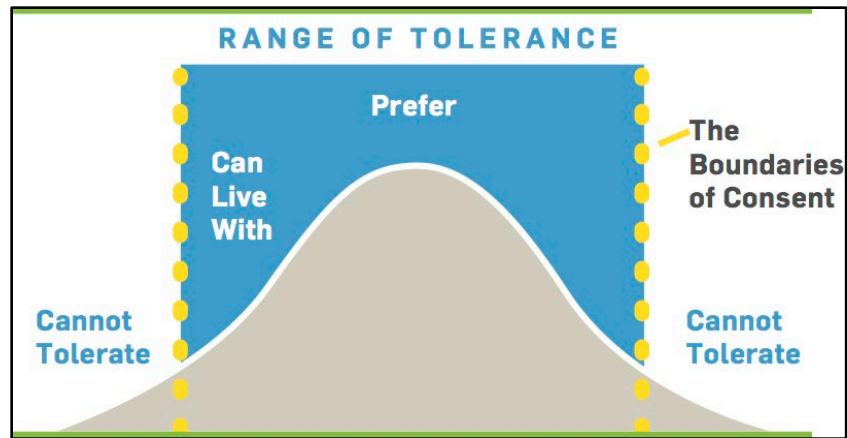


Illustration of the range of tolerance within the consent-based decision making model by Circle Forward

Members spoke highly of this decision-making process. For example, one member shared that it *“brings a level of comfort knowing that there’s not one person making a single decision without the whole collective.”* However, in actual practice there are some decisions made outside of this model. For example, one member shared, *“With the Symposium, because there was so much going on and there was basically rushing to put this event on, some of the consent-based kinds of protocols and ways of being were not followed which caused tension.”* In contrast, another noted that *“there are small things like what hotel to stay at for the Symposium that doesn’t need to go through a consent-based decision-making process necessarily.”* These two statements illustrate a difference in perspective that causes some tension in the network. This suggests that the Alliance is in part meeting Community Expectation #2 and #5, though there is some room for improvement and increased transparency about when the process is used.

During interviews, members voiced varying levels of familiarity with this reality. While some members said that this model is always used, others noted that there are some decisions, particularly larger network structure and funding decisions, that are made outside of this model. One member also noted that while they haven’t seen the decision-making process intentionally *not* used, sometimes in workgroup meetings there is not sufficient time allotted in order to fully employ the consent-based model. Due to the decentralized nature, it can also be difficult for members to trace back how a decision was made, pointing to internal communications challenges. In many cases, new developments are shared without giving context as to who was part of the decision making or how the decision was landed on. While lengthy explanations are not always necessary, giving some information about this may help clarify processes to members and create more cohesion across the network.

Decisions outside of the consent model typically are made by contractors and/or Recover Alaska staff. As one contractor noted, *“We have to recognize that power imbalance.”* This has been an ongoing tension in the Alliance. As one member explained, *“At some point, there’s*

grant money and there's fiscal sponsors, and that means that those folks often have the power to make decisions.”

“Sometimes if network members in those small workgroups are not available, then the decision is kind of made by default. And as a contractor, sometimes that I have felt like I have been responsible for decision, which makes me feel uncomfortable because even though I consider myself a member I am still a paid contractor. So, I get nervous feeling like, I don't want to it to be seen or I don't want to feel like I'm taking advantage of my position in any way to make a decision.” - Alliance contractor

To this end, some members also noted that people tend to look to the Network Coordinator and/or contractors to take on a degree of leadership when making decisions. This is sometimes described as falling back on typical work hierarchies but also may be because members believe these people have more insight about the decision at hand and its implications for the network as the Network Coordinator and contractors are often more consistently and deeply involved in Alliance spaces and leadership. The lack of clarity about when decisions can be made without explicit consent from each member can also cause challenges in how to move forward. As one contractor reflected, *“If I'm not hearing back from people, is it okay for me to just move forward with something?”* Some members asked for more transparent communication about how decisions are made, and when the consent-based model is and is not used.

LEADERSHIP & TRANSITIONS

During interviews, several members spoke about the upcoming transition in staffing for the Network Coordinator position. Many members see the original Network Coordinator as a key person who holds the vision and philosophy of the Alliance, and some voiced concern that the transition may cause a loss of momentum or change in the network's approach. There were also concerns that some members may expect the new Network Coordinator to be “a carbon copy” of the prior, with the same approach and style. In other words, some members worry the network has become hinged, to an extent, on the particular style of the individual who has coordinated and played a major role in developing the Alliance. To a degree, this detracts from the decentralized model of the network. However, having a backbone structure is a core element of Collective Impact framework, which also suggests this is a natural tension that results from the overlapping frameworks used by the Alliance. As the Alliance moves into this significant shift, it will be important to have ongoing conversations about how to maintain the momentum and network culture and continue to grow individual member leadership. Turnover in the Network Coordinator position also opens up opportunities to explore new perspectives and approaches.

FOSTERING MEMBER LEADERSHIP

In recent years, there has been ongoing discussion in the Alliance to increase member leadership and thereby depend less on contractors. This work supports Community Expectation #4, supporting member leadership. This year, the Strategy Design Workgroup developed a new Network Weaver role for workgroups in the Alliance to this end. This role includes facilitation of workgroup meetings and supporting communication between their workgroup and the broader network through newsletter updates and in meetings with other Weavers and contractors. This role is compensated with an annual \$9,200 stipend. At the time of this report, this role has been filled for three workgroups: Communications/Social Norms, Data and Learning, and Strategy Design. Growing member leadership can also support the sustainability of the network. The Strategy Design Network Weaver role was filled by one of the Alliance contractors, which highlights the grey area between contractors and members. In the Alliance, contractors are considered members, while at the same time, there are many conversations about the need to move away from reliance on contractors. This creates a lack of clarity about the distinction between these roles.

The Evaluation & Learning Workgroup has created a similar, though slightly different, Evaluation Liaison role with an annual stipend of \$5,500. This role serves to support the Evaluation & Learning Workgroup meetings, and gather input from other workgroups on evaluation processes. This role has not yet been filled. It is expected that these roles will become active when the Alliance reconvenes in the fall of 2023.

In addition, Regional Co-Chairs decided to develop a Regional Co-Chair Builder position to provide additional support to Co-Chairs. This role is compensated with a \$9,200 annual stipend and has been filled for the next fiscal year. Some members, including several Regional Co-Chairs, expressed an appreciation for trainings and professional development opportunities that help them build their leadership skills. Continuing to offer these opportunities, as well as connecting these opportunities directly to member roles within the network, can be a great way to continue supporting this area of work. For example, several Regional Co-Chairs spoke about how helping plan and facilitate the Symposium allowed them to grow and practice their leadership skills.

Member leadership challenges

One significant challenge the Alliance has continued to face in growing member leadership, and even engagement, is each member's limited capacity to participate in network meetings and events. Many members spoke to the fact that people working in the prevention and community service fields are often overworked which limits their capacity to engage, even if there is interest. In the quarterly reporting this past fiscal year, all workgroups have noted a low number of participating members.

Another challenge is the length of time it takes for new members to get oriented to the Alliance, which inhibits their degree of participation. Several members noted during interviews that at the beginning of their participation it was unclear how they could get involved, and what all is taking place in the Alliance. As mentioned previously, even some Regional Co-Chairs struggle to describe the work and purpose of the Alliance.

Some members gave suggestions to improve member leadership in the network, including:

- » *Host new member onboarding meetings to help new members understand where and how they can get involved*
- » *Create a system of rotating roles, such as workgroup facilitators, rather than a long-term single-person role*
- » *Offer trainings or support members in attending other trainings on skills such as facilitation*

RESILIENCE AND TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

“One core practice of resilience is transformative justice, transforming the conditions that make injustice possible.” - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

The Alliance makes a point to center diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of their work to effect systems change. Internally, this includes working to increase representation from the various geographic and cultural communities across the state, particularly communities that are commonly underrepresented such as Alaska Native and rural communities, and creating meeting spaces that allow for active inclusion. One member reflected, *“Some strategies of being more inclusive I wouldn't have without being part of the Alliance.”* The Alliance’s approach to transformative justice focuses on creating positive changes in relationships and mental models that influence how individuals work within the prevention landscape. Consent-based decision making is one strategy aimed at removing root causes of harm by creating more equitable decision-making spaces, although it is not always used consistently as previously discussed.

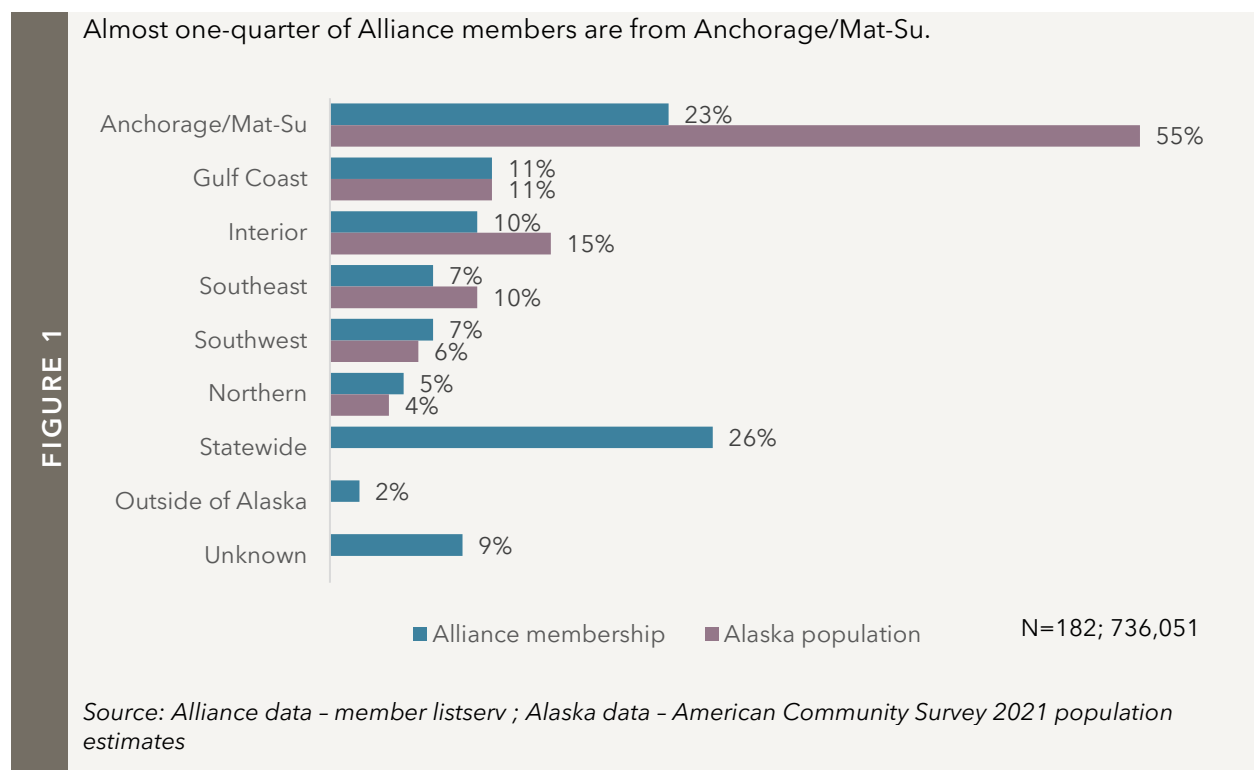
“We have folks that come across the gambit who come in and are able to share in context what their observations are in the community, of what needs to be worked on... who are actually engaged in the community itself, and that's across the state.” - Alliance member

Some workgroups have a more specific focus on resilience and transformative justice. The Transforming Conflict Workgroup hosted educational meetings in FY 2023, open to all members, to learn about how different people respond to conflict as well as how to work through conflict effectively. The goal of these sessions is to not only support conflict resolution within the Alliance but also to help members gain skills in handling conflict outside of the network in their personal and professional lives. Learning about conflict resolution

supports relationship change, one of the three levels of change within the Systems Change framework. The Data & Learning Workgroup also hosts conversations around increasing data equity in the state and supporting capacity building for data collection in small communities. As part of this, the workgroup presented at the Alaska Wellness & Prevention Symposium.

MEMBERSHIP REPRESENTATION

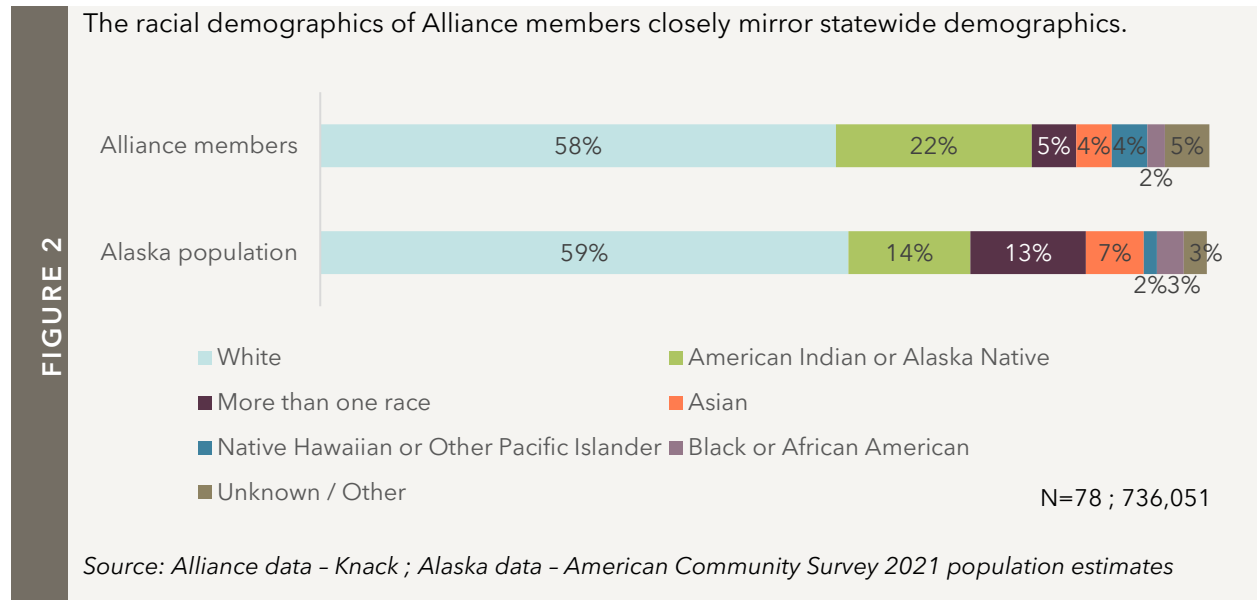
In FY 2023, membership has diversified in terms of regional representation. Geographic representation among members of the Alliance is based on the Alaska public health regions (Anchorage, Gulf Coast, Interior, Mat-Su, Northern, Southeast, and Southwest). Each member has self-identified their public health region, and about one-quarter listed their region as 'statewide.' This is likely due to different ways of interpreting the question of community - personal residence versus the community their organization serves. While it is difficult to draw comparisons to state population due to this 'statewide' category, it does provide some context for representation in the network from across the state. The Northern region of the state is the least represented in the network, while Anchorage/Mat-Su is the most represented which is concurrent with state population distribution.



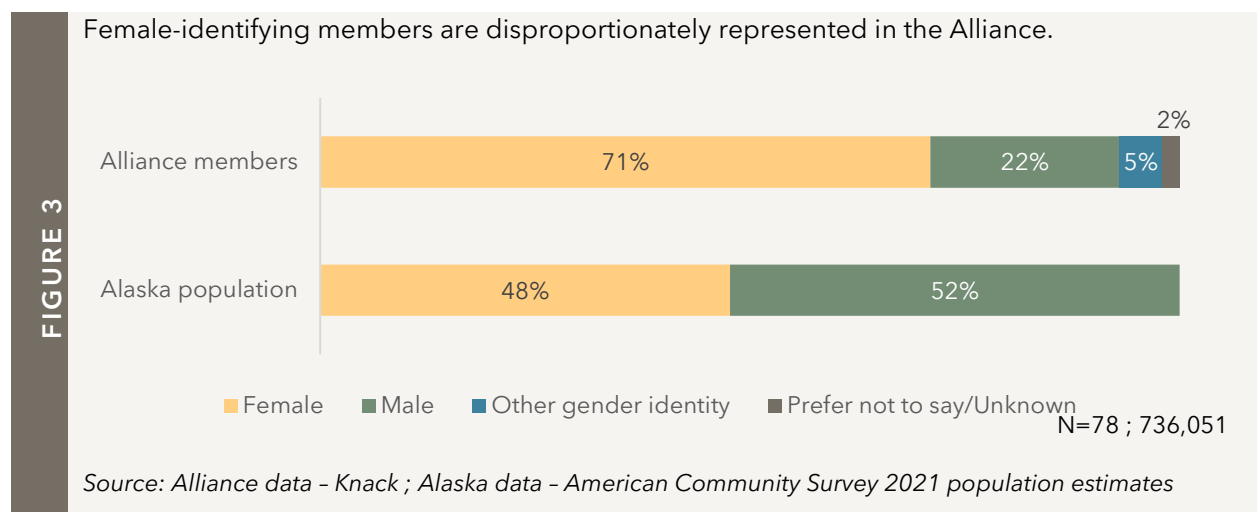
Other demographic data on members is available through the Knack online platform which creates individual profiles with key demographic information. The Alliance began using Knack in FY 2022 for members to sign in at Alliance events. Creation of a Knack profile is

optional, though encouraged. Currently, 78 members (45%) have a Knack profile. The following demographic data is based on Knack profiles.

More than half (58%) of Alliance members identify as White, followed by 22% who identify as Alaska Native/American Indian. All other racial/ethnic groups account for 5% or less of the total membership. Representation of different racial groups in the Alliance is very similar to state composition.



In terms of gender identity, the Alliance is weighted towards female members (71%). In comparison, 48% of Alaska residents are female. The percentage of members who identify as female has been increasing this past fiscal year, from 66% in Quarter Two (when Knack was first implemented).



FRACTAL

“A fractal is a never-ending pattern. Fractals are infinitely complex patterns that are self similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop.” - Brown, A. (2017). Emergent strategy. AK Press.

The Alliance seeks to create system-level changes in the prevention field by “being an example of what is possible,” a common phrase used by members. During interviews, members spoke of the impact their participation has had on them. They gave examples of impacts in their personal lives, their work and engagement with their community, as well as impacts on the broader prevention landscape. Within the Systems Change framework, many of the impacts expressed by members fall within the areas of relational and transformative changes. In other words, they are changes in relationships, connections, power dynamics, and mental models. This focus is also in line with the Alliance’s goals of building power and building relationships.

The Alliance is fractal in that members come together, learn, and engage in shared topics, and members can then bring into other spaces across the state and prevention field. Similarly, members can bring new ideas and insights they learn in other spaces into Alliance meetings, creating a continuous feedback loop of sharing and growth. During interviews, members shared several examples of how the Alliance has inspired them in their professional work, including:

- » *Bringing consent-based decision making to other community groups and coalitions*
- » *Being intentional with check-ins at the beginning of meetings*
- » *Hosting town halls on alcohol misuse topics*
- » *Creating a local radio show showcasing individuals’ stories of recovery*
- » *Sharing data equity resources with others*
- » *Incorporating new systems of sharing group meeting minutes, documents, etc.*

“Whether the Alliance knows this or not, I think they’re in a unique position within the state to be a leading practitioner in that emergent thinking and systems thinking... I don’t see that being practiced elsewhere.” - Alliance member

In addition, some members spoke about personal impacts such as learning and applying better self-care, working on decreasing their sense of urgency and productivity mindset, and learning new skills and information they can use in other areas of their life. By impacting individual members, the Alliance has ripple effects on the broader system and state.

One member suggested that the Alliance host workshops on the principles it is built on to help others in prevention learn about how to apply them in meaningful ways both personally and professionally. For example, the Symposium is a good place to begin sharing the

philosophy of the Alliance with a broader audience, and this approach could be built upon to further share out across the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alliance provides a space for members to explore new ways of working and interacting within the field of prevention, and all members spoke highly of their experience in the network. Many members believe the Alliance has an opportunity to create significant impacts within the state through its novel approach. However, like any network, members also face challenges. This includes being unclear of the central purpose of the network, how day-to-day actions connect to the network's goals, and member roles and responsibilities. Based on the findings explored in this report, the following recommendations have been made to further strengthen the Alliance.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Continue to strengthen internal communications

The Alliance has made efforts in the past year to increase internal communications. This includes the new quarterly reports that are shared via the listserv, a monthly newsletter, and an ad hoc workgroup to create informational materials on the network structure and processes. However, members still express some lack of clarity about how the network works towards its goals, how to get involved, and how decisions are made. Due to the iterative and decentralized nature of the Alliance, strong internal communications and greater transparency is critical. There are many possibilities for how internal communications could be further strengthened. For example, workgroup meeting minutes could be saved in a central file that all members have easy access to (and are regularly made aware of), quarterly reporting could be structured to create more clarity on what major decisions have been made, or Integration Sessions could include a network update component. Interview participants also gave some suggestions on how to support member leadership, as described on page 15.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Create onboarding processes for new members

New members continue to express confusion about the Alliance's structure, processes, and how to engage. As a result, new members are often less engaged in activities and decision-making, and may not continue to engage in meetings. Members have proposed several ideas for how to support new members in onboarding but none have yet come to fruition. This includes the Alliance Community Expectation (#6) to create peer mentors for new members, onboarding videos, and regularly held new member meetings. It would be valuable for the Alliance to dedicate time and attention to this area, particularly as the network continues to recruit new members and promote the network across the state.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Clarify how activities in the Alliance connect to overarching goals

There continues to be differing levels of understanding among members as to how day-to-day activities of the Alliance support the achievement of identified goals. While some members believe "the network is the strategy," others ask when the network will engage in

more direct strategies/activities to achieve goals. It may be beneficial for the Alliance to hold group discussions to clarify the network's purpose and intended outcomes, as well as members' roles in ideating, executing, and evaluating activities, in order to reach a mutual understanding. Creating a shared document that details the Alliance's theory of change can also help increase clarity and provide an easy reference for members.

APPENDIX A: PEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How would you describe your experience with the Alliance?
 - a) How long have you been a part of the Alliance?
 - b) What is your current involvement like?
2. In your own words, what are the Alliance's goals?
 - a) How does the Alliance work towards achieving its goals? Please use examples/details.
 - b) In your perspective, is there a shared agreement among members about forwarding the goals of the Alliance? Why or why not?
3. Describe your experience with decision-making in the Alliance.
 - a) When is it used?
 - b) When is it not used?
 - c) How well does the decision-making process work for the network?
 - d) Who holds power in decisions you've participated in?
4. How could support of member leadership be improved?
5. What do you think are the strengths of the Alliance? Please describe.
 - a) How can the Alliance continue to build off its strengths?
6. Share a story that illustrates the most significant change that has resulted from your participation in the Alliance. This can be something you've learned, you've shared with others, or that you have applied to your work/community.
 - a) Why is this story significant to you?
7. Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share about the Alliance or your experience as a member?

¹ brown, adrienne m. Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017, p. 5, 6.

² brown, adrienne m. Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017, p. 5, 6.