

EXPLORING ALUTIIQ HERITAGE ONE WORD AT A TIME

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ABSTRACT

Every Sunday the Alutiiq Museum publishes the Alutiiq Word of the Week—a short cultural lesson. The program shares Alutiiq language and traditions with radio, print, and digital resources. What began as a community cultural lesson, designed to promote awareness of hidden history, has become a tool for Alutiiq language research. This essay explores language documentation and education in museum settings and reviews the evolution of the Alutiiq Word of the Week program as an example. The discussion illustrates how museums are not simply places to archive language information, but community organizations uniquely situated to assist with the study and sharing of the world's languages.

INTRODUCTION

It's eleven am on a Friday, and Alutiiq Elders are gathered around a conference table sipping tea, socializing, and sharing cultural knowledge at the Alutiiq Museum, a tribal cultural center in Kodiak, Alaska. The six assembled are fluent Alutiiq language speakers and a significant portion of the last people to learn Alutiiq as children. They converse in both English and Alutiiq, switching seamlessly between languages as they discuss topics raised by museum staff members. This week the group focuses on a draft of *Coloring Alutiiq*, a culturally themed activity book the museum is producing for youth (Sholl 2018). They pore over line drawings of Alutiiq clothes and the animals and tools used in their manufacture. For each image Elders discuss Alutiiq vocabulary that could be added to the presentation and make recommendations for the words that best describe the images. Their goal is to reinforce language learning in children as they color pictures of ancestral parkas, boots, and hats. Many of the terms are easily agreed upon. Others, especially the word for a pair of tall skin boots, invoke long thoughtful discussion or are deferred for additional consideration at the next meeting.

This vignette is just one example of the diverse subjects considered at the museum's weekly Elders' Sessions.

Earlier in the month, the group watched a PowerPoint presentation on recently identified archaeological sites. A museum archaeologist presented his finds. He shared site photographs and information on locations, characteristics, and historically known uses. Then, Elders developed an Alutiiq name for each ancestral settlement. The discussion induced memories of travel, resources, and family harvesting activities. This influenced name selection and enriched site provenance.¹ In future weeks, Elders might review Alutiiq terms from a historic account to decode awkward transliterations and confirm or challenge the reported meanings of words. They may share recollections of Alutiiq place names with a researcher or answer a public request for assistance with an Alutiiq title for a local newsletter, award, office sign, or program (Fig. 1).

These gatherings are part of the Alutiiq Museum's *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit* (or "people of the island") Language Program, a long-term effort to document and preserve the Alutiiq language. Alutiiq is one of the five Alaska Native languages that form the Esk-Aleut language family, a group of indigenous languages spoken from Greenland to the Gulf of Alaska (Woodbury 1984). Alutiiq, also known as Sugpiaq or Sugt'stun, is part of the Eskimoan branch,



Figure 1. Alutiiq speakers Katheryn Chichenoff, Nick Alokli, and Sally Carlough watch a presentation and discuss Alutiiq terminology at an Elders' Session. Staff photograph courtesy the Alutiiq Museum.

and it is most closely related to Central Alaska Yup'ik (Krauss 1982). It is spoken in Prince William Sound, the outer Kenai Peninsula, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the Alaska Peninsula, in two dialects—Chugach Alutiiq and Koniag Alutiiq. The Alutiiq Museum's programs focus on documenting and sharing the Kodiak Island subdialect of Koniag Alutiiq. This includes both the northern and southern ways of speaking found in the Kodiak Archipelago. According to Alutiiq Museum surveys, there are only about 25 fluent speakers of the Kodiak subdialect living today, down from the 45 speakers identified in 2005 (Hegna 2004:6).

Launched in 2003, the *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit* Language Program unites the efforts of Kodiak Alutiiq speakers, tribes, corporations formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), community organizations, and the Alutiiq Museum for the urgent and arduous work of language preservation. The program documents the Alutiiq language, creates language learning resources and opportunities, trains new Alutiiq speakers, and leads terminological development—all to ensure the continued vitality of Kodiak's first language (Counciller 2010, 2012). Scholars note the critical importance of these efforts to the Kodiak Alutiiq cultural renaissance (Drabek

2012:57) and demonstrate how linguistic research is essential to cultural revitalization (Counciller 2015:347; 2018:117–125, 187–192; Counciller and Leer 2012:1–2; Kimura and Counciller 2009). Documenting the Alutiiq language—from vocabulary and grammatical constructions to regional ways of speaking—provides critical information for cultural education. Languages are lineages, living systems inherited from previous generations (Heggarty 2014). As such, they encode cultural beliefs, values, perspectives, environmental information, cultural encounters, and much more. Alutiiq is a rich record of Kodiak's Native heritage, and it provides an alternative view of Alutiiq history, distinct from archaeological finds or genetic studies. Moreover, documenting and sharing Alutiiq gives authority to culture bearers, builds a sense of community and identity among speakers, helps people live their culture, and returns heritage to community awareness (Counciller 2012:16). For all of these reasons, linguistic research and language education have become a core component of anthropological studies at the Alutiiq Museum.

Although the Friday gatherings of Elders may appear informal on the surface, focused on tasks supporting museum projects, they are rich research sessions. Each

meeting is carefully planned, recorded, and archived. Discussions follow a loose agenda but leave ample room for culture bearers to share their knowledge of history and traditions, in addition to language. The museum infuses the meetings with Alutiiq values. Elders are esteemed partners placed at the center of research efforts. They have authority over linguistic choices—their decisions are honored. Moreover, the museum works to make the research experience respectful by providing a staff liaison, meeting reminders, transportation arrangements, snacks, comfortable seating, an honorarium, and ready acknowledgement of Elders' contributions. The result is an effective linguistic research program that fuels the museum's collections care and education efforts. Elders' Sessions generate linguistic information and oral history for the museum's archives, which feed exhibits, publications, and programs that elucidate Alutiiq traditions. The Alutiiq Word of the Week, the museum's weekly radio broadcast on all things Alutiiq, is an example of this process.

For 22 years, the Alutiiq Word of the Week has shared Alutiiq heritage, integrating information from linguistic, archaeological, historical, and cultural research to create a versatile, lasting educational resource for public education. The development and evolution of the program mirrors that of linguistic studies at the Alutiiq Museum and illustrates the value of Native language research to public programming.

LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AND MUSEUMS

The number of museums devoted to language study, interpretation, and/or education is small but growing. Of the estimated 55,000 museums around the world (De Gruyter Saur 2017), just 80 (0.14%) have a substantial linguistic focus. This includes museums that share the history of language, document specific languages, chronicle the lives of linguists, and interpret writing or written culture (Grepstad 2018).² While additional anthropology museums hold substantial linguistic collections and share exhibits exploring language, the number of museums actively leading language research and education is small. This is especially true for museums focused on non-European languages. Grepstad (2018:5) notes that the majority of living languages are found outside of Europe. However, two-thirds of the museums identified as having a language focus explore European languages. And in the United States, tribal museums and culture centers often address

language documentation and education, but non-Native museums seldom do (McClain 2014:2, 48).

In part, the paucity of museum-based language research and programming reflects the history of museums. Museums originated as object repositories. In the United States, anthropology museums developed from natural history museums to study cultural materials (Wali et al. 2012). They began as places to share curios assembled by the wealthy; evolved into homes for creating, preserving, categorizing, and sharing collections; and have long been defined as institutions that own or use objects (Alexander and Alexander 1996:2; Cameron 2004; Herle 2016; McClain 2014:55; Macdonald 2011). Although there are abundant examples of language collections, historically, archaeological and ethnographic research have produced the bulk of collections found in anthropology museums. Moreover, until the 1970s, the Western museum paradigm slanted museum-based language research toward ancient texts and Eurocentric interpretations of world cultures as past, static, or less developed (Wilson 2012:34). Research on living languages, and the products of this research, fit more comfortably in academic departments rather than museums. Similarly, language education was the domain of school and university classrooms.

Over the past 40 years, the museum landscape has changed dramatically. Questions of representation—the dominance of colonial perspectives, the assumed authority of curators, the lack of source community choices and voices—challenged museums to transform their research and interpretive processes (McClain 2014:56–57; Wali et al. 2012). The new museology redirected institutional attention toward decolonization, collaboration, and public service (Alexander and Alexander 1996:8–10; Macdonald 2011:3). Museums moved away from bounded, paternalistic views of culture, grounded in classification and the dissemination of perceived facts, to a more inclusive, open model that stresses multiculturalism, contextualization, and mutual benefit (Herle 2016; Macdonald 2011:2). Many now work to share the dynamic nature of culture and facilitate experiences that support community interests and participation and build visitor understanding (Wilson 2012:34). Cameron (2004:73) describes this as a transformation from temple (a shrine to art and artifacts) to forum (a place of discussion and idea sharing), although he notes that museums by necessity have elements of both.

Under this new paradigm, there has been a renewed effort to unite learning from research with museum practices (Macdonald 2011:6). Perhaps as a result, language research and programming are on the rise in the museum setting. According to Grepstad, about half of the world's museums with a substantial language focus formed since 2000 (2018:5). Many other museums are exploring ways to integrate multilingualism and even language research into programming. For example, museums in the United States are offering tours and workshops in languages other than English, hosting cultural celebrations for immigrant communities, developing written and digital resources in other languages, holding second-language classes for children, and entering into international exchanges that promote language acquisition and cultural learning (Lever 2015; Wilson 2012:9). There is even a science museum at Ohio State University with a large language research pod in its exhibit gallery. Here visitors can watch linguists at work and participate in linguistic research (Wagner et al. 2015:421).

Why are museums expanding their focus on language research and programming, and why should they do this work? At a broad level, there is an urgent, worldwide need for language documentation and preservation. Of the roughly 6000 languages spoken around the globe today, 43 percent are likely to be lost by the end of this century (UNESCO 2010). Another 40 percent of world's languages will be endangered, leaving few safe (Krauss 2007a:3–4). This situation is particularly pronounced in the Pacific Rim, where an estimated 72 percent of the nearly extinct languages are spoken (Miyaoaka and Sakiyama 2007:xi). This includes most of Alaska's Native languages (Krauss 2007b:408). Organizations like the United Nations, U.S. Administration for Native Americans, the American Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, the Smithsonian Institution, the nonprofit Endangered Language Alliance, and many others emphasize the value of linguistic diversity and the immediate need for research and education to preserve unique pieces of the human experience (Haworth 2017).

Governments are also taking notice. The Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 provides federal support for the protection of Native American languages. In 2012, Alaska lawmakers passed legislation establishing the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, a state-level voice

for language documentation and education (McClain 2014:35–36). This was followed by the Official Languages Act of 2014, legislation that added 20 Indigenous languages to Alaska's list of official languages (Smith 2014). And in 2018, at the urging of the Alaska legislature, Governor Bill Walker declared a state of emergency for Alaska Native languages and directed the Alaska Department of Education to work with tribal partners to promote the use of Native languages in public education (Baxter 2018). All of these circumstances, and growing multilingualism in America, have created new incentives for museums to implement language research and programming. There are also subtler reasons for this work.

Wilson (2012) argues that the goals of language education and modern museology overlap strongly and that museums are uniquely positioned to assist. First, language education has long been provided by schools, and museums have a history of partnering with schools (Wilson 2012:8). Second, language education supports cultural education. The two are tightly linked and complementary. Learning another language strengthens cultural competency. It helps audiences move beyond shame, misunderstanding, ethnocentrism, and stereotyping, a goal of a number of modern museum programs (Wilson 2012:15). Third, many communities have publicly expressed needs for language education or preservation, needs that museums can help address and that help museums demonstrate their commitment to public service (Wilson 2012:6). Finally, museum collections are valuable tools for language education. Objects provide opportunities for experiential learning that can strengthen language lessons. They stimulate multiple ways of learning (Wilson 2012:11–14).

Although Wilson does not explore the value of linguistic research in museums, it is not hard to see how such investigations elucidate the cultural content of objects and provide a foundation for language education in the museum setting (McClain 2014:7). Moreover, in their role as collecting institutions, museums are excellent repositories for the products of linguistic research—notes, texts, audio and video recordings, and photographs. Add to this the limited number of linguists available to document and teach hundreds of threatened languages (McClain 2014:40), as well as the interest of many linguists in theoretical research rather than language documentation or education, and the potential for museums to assist is evident.

THE ALUTIIQ WORD OF THE WEEK

The Alutiiq Museum's efforts to document and teach the Alutiiq language reflect the widening of the museum concept generally and efforts to address the Alutiiq community's strong desire for language preservation specifically. In 1995, the museum was established by eight Kodiak Alutiiq organizations as an archaeological repository.³ Funding secured by the Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council supported the development of a 5500-square-foot facility. The building was designed to house archaeological collections from the spill area, advance historic preservation, and provide a home for cultural programming already under way at KANA (Pullar et al. 2013). The earliest years of the museum's operations were devoted to establishing institutional systems, developing exhibits, shaping the collections program, and conducting community-based archaeological research (Steffian and Saltonstall 2007).

Alutiiq language research and education, although nascent in Kodiak (Hegna 2004), did not begin formally at the museum until 2003, when the *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit* Language Advisory Committee (or Qik Committee) formed to coordinate language preservation efforts across the region (Kimura and Counciller 2009:130). Museum staff members helped to lead the island-wide group through strategic planning and then worked to implement aspects of the committee's community language plan.

The first major museum initiative was a master-apprentice program. This three-year effort to grow speakers paired fluent Elders with adult learners for an immersive experience, mirroring language revitalization programs implemented by other Indigenous communities (Hinton and Hale 2001). This important initial project created a foundation for a diversity of language documentation, education, and resource development projects throughout the region that continue today. In particular, it developed a bond between speakers and the museum. Just 15 years after the master-apprentice project commenced, there is an online language portal with a large archive of the language recordings compiled by the museum (<http://languagearchive.alutiiqmuseum.org/home>), a website filled with language education resources (www.alutiiqlanguage.org), a published orthography, a conversational phrasebook, online vocabulary finders, a picture dictionary of Alutiiq terms, digital story books in Alutiiq, an Alutiiq language nest where preschoolers are immersed

in the language, and many other resources built through community partnerships.

One of the museum's significant contributions to this effort was the creation of the Alutiiq New Words Council—a group of Elder speakers assembled to conduct terminological development (Counciller 2010). Languages are living systems that change as cultures change. For Indigenous languages to thrive in the modern world, speakers needed to be able to discuss modern items and concepts, from credit cards to St. Patrick's Day. Funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and advice from the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee (Kimura and Counciller 2012:131, Hua'olelo et al. 2003) helped the museum create the council and establish protocols for word creation. Briefly, council meetings focused on a selection of needed words proposed by anyone. Words moved sequentially through three lists—upcoming, in discussion, and approved—with careful review, discussion, and consensus building. Counciller describes the variety of linguistic techniques used in new word creation and the ways that Elders led this process (Kimura and Counciller 2012:132–134). Equally important, council meetings became a forum for broader linguistic and cultural sharing and, eventually, a model for language research. When the NSF-funded project ended, the museum found ways to continue the council's work through regular Elders' Sessions and to link linguistic research to other museum programs, including the Alutiiq Word of the Week.

The Alutiiq Word of the Week began in 1998. As originally conceived, the Word of the Week was not a research project or a language program. It was a public education program, a way to make Alutiiq culture and history accessible to the public. Two centuries of cultural suppression had made it hard for the Kodiak Alutiiq to know and share their culture, and it had perpetuated hurtful stereotypes (Black 1992; Pullar 1992). Much of the Alutiiq world was hidden from view—preserved in the knowledge of Elders, published in obscure books, stored in distant museums, and buried in archaeological sites. When the museum opened its doors, there was a hunger for accurate, accessible, cultural information and an overwhelming number of public requests for this information. When KMXT Public Radio expressed interest in airing a weekly cultural lesson, staff members saw an opportunity to share Alutiiq language and traditions broadly via the airways. The Alutiiq Word of the Week program was the result.

The program started as a radio spot, a few-minute lesson that aired three times per week. Each lesson featured an Alutiiq word, pronounced in Alutiiq and translated into English by speaker Florence Pestrikoff, with a related Alutiiq language sentence. A brief cultural lesson followed the language offering. These three-paragraph summaries shared cultural and historical information and were often tailored to the season (Steffian and Counciller 2012; Steffian and Pestrikoff 1999). A lesson on berry picking aired in August and one on gift giving debuted in December. In the first few years of the program, museum staff member Amy Steffian developed the lessons in consultation with Pestrikoff. Much of the content focused on information gleaned from archaeological research and ethnohistorical accounts of Kodiak (e.g., Birket-Smith 1953; Clark 1987; Davydov 1977; Knecht and Jordan 1985). The lessons were fresh to listeners, but shared information available in published sources and often about the past. They were a repackaging of existing information not easily accessed by the public.

The program was immediately popular, and soon after it first aired, the museum started to fax and email broadcasts of the lessons, and the *Kodiak Daily Mirror*

added it to the Friday edition of the newspaper (Steffian and Counciller 2012). Strong community interest and a series of small grants encouraged the museum to make the program an annual offering. However, it was clear that the museum needed help generating lesson content—both linguistically and culturally. What began as an effort to simply meet a crushing demand for cultural information developed into a unique opportunity to involve Native voices in sharing the long-hidden Alutiiq world and to create community conversations about all things Alutiiq—from the language to twentieth-century history, modern traditions, place names, food, medicine, spirituality, humor, and the natural world. April Counciller, who led the museum's language programs at the time, offered to help and to involve Elder Alutiiq speakers. In 2002, Elder Sophie Katelnikof Shepherd became the voice of the program. In 2004, Elder Nick Alokli joined her.

Partnering with the developing language program proved to be a good fit. Speakers were familiar with the lessons and had ideas for improvements. Moreover, Elders' discussions about Alutiiq words generated interesting, unpublished information for lessons, expanding the content of the program to represent much more





Figure 2. *Alutiiq Word of the Week* lesson graphics for social media posts (left) and website and email broadcasts (right). Graphic design by Brian Fraley and Alex Painter. Photograph by Amy Steffian. Courtesy the Alutiiq Museum.

of the Alutiiq experience. One lively discussion led to a lesson on the uses of Spam. Another conversation revealed the hazards of eating unripe salmonberries (Fig. 2 and lesson example).

Example lesson:

Urungilet, Urunguliit—Green Salmonberries

Aanamaniu'utaaqiinga "Urunguliitpiturkunaki."—My mom always told me not to eat the unripe salmonberries.

Word and Sentence: <https://alutiiqmuseum.org/images/stories/audio/archive/greensalmonberries2.mp3>

Podcast: https://alutiiqmuseum.org/media/com_podcastmanager/2108_GreenSalmonberries2.mp3

Salmonberries (*Rubus spectabilis Pursh*) are perhaps the most widely harvested wild fruit in the Kodiak region. The big juicy berries are a favorite summer treat, enjoyed fresh and in a mouth-watering assortment of desserts and preserves.

Salmonberries flower in late spring and bear fruit between June and August. Harvesters have different opinions about when they are best to pick. Some gather the fruit when it is bright red. Others wait until the berries ripen to a deep crimson color. However, all agree that unripe berries should be avoided. Eating green, yellow, or even lightly red berries can cause constipation. For this reason, many Alutiiq people eat salmonberries mixed with sugar and milk. This simple dish helps people avoid the unpleasant side effects of consuming quantities of these tasty but binding berries, especially if they are not entirely ripe.

If a love of salmonberries leads to an uncomfortable situation, there are traditional remedies. Tea made from pineapple weed (*Matricaria discoidea* DC) is said to be soothing and have a gentle laxative effect. If you need something more powerful, culture bearers advise eating boiled sourdock leaves and stems (*Rumex occidentalis* S. Watson) by themselves. A tea made by boiling sourdock roots is also an effective treatment. Be careful, however, sourdock is also an emetic. Too much taken by itself can induce vomiting!

Today, the format of the Alutiiq Word of the Week radio show is the same as in 1998, but lesson development is purposefully different. Every spring the museum creates 12 to 15 new lessons for the upcoming season and systematically selects older lessons to recycle. After eight

years of writing a weekly lesson, program staff and advisors felt that there were many great topics that deserved to be shared again. The selection of new lessons begins with presentations at Elders' Sessions. Staff members, who have collected ideas for feature words over the previous year, develop a PowerPoint presentation. Each slide includes a photo and any available linguistic information for about 20 potential words. Word ideas also come from the museum's research efforts, recent acquisitions, or public requests for information. Some of the words are terms collected at previous Elders' Sessions. For example, when the museum received a donation of a rare bentwood quiver, staff members asked Elders for the Alutiiq term. A year later, Elders selected *ruuwauteq*—quiver (literally "thing for holding arrows")—to feature in a new lesson.

At Elders' Sessions, speakers review the suggested words and discuss whether they are appropriate to use. Sometimes a word isn't well known, and Elders are not comfortable with its selection or pronunciation. Staff members suggested the word "mushroom" for several years, until, after many discussions, Elders agreed on *slaaparaaq* or *sliyaaparaq* as appropriate terms. If Elders approve of a word, by unanimous consent or deference to someone in the group with specific knowledge, they help to write a related sentence. They may also offer some cultural information for the lessons. The lesson on *urungilet, urunguliit*—green salmonberries (Fig. 2 and example lesson)—came from an Elders' Session discussion, which expanded cultural knowledge collected in 1990 (Russell 2017:71).

With word selections made, staff members write the cultural lessons, assemble a script, and work with Shepherd and Alokli to record the content for the radio broadcast. In recent years, this process has included adult language learners Marya Halvorsen and Dehrich Chya, who recorded the English portion of the lessons. Over the years, the program has also evolved technologically. The museum dropped the fax broadcast years ago in favor of online tools that make the lessons widely accessible, interactive, and easy to share (Table 1). Patrons who enjoyed the written lessons asked for a way to hear the Alutiiq words. Many wanted to practice pronunciations. The museum responded by developing a short audio file for each word and sentence combination and linking them to lessons posted online. Now recipients of the email broadcast or followers of the museum's social media sites can click on the Alutiiq language portion of their lesson and hear

Table 1. Alutiiq Word of the Week program features.

Distribution	Description	Reach
Radio broadcast 1998–present	Lesson recorded by the museum and aired by KMXT Public Radio. Each lesson includes an introduction with Alutiiq music and a welcome message, Elders saying a word and sentence in Alutiiq, a community member reading the cultural lesson, and an outro with acknowledgements and music. KMXT airs each individual lesson three times per week.	KMXT broadcasts to all Kodiak communities, a total population of about 13,200, and has online live streaming. Other stations, like KBBI in Homer, also broadcast the lessons.
Email broadcast 1998–present	A copy of the lesson broadcast to an email list open to anyone. The email broadcast began soon after the lessons first aired on KMXT. It included just the lesson text but eventually expanded to include a template with a photo and, in 2014, a program logo. Today the emailed lessons include links to audio files.	The current broadcast list includes 343 subscribers.
Fax broadcast 1998–2002	A copy of the lesson text faxed to a distribution list open to anyone. The fax list was particularly helpful in sharing the list with organizations and businesses.	Less than 50
Newspaper publication 1999–present	Weekly lessons published in the Friday edition of the Kodiak Daily Mirror. About six months after the program debuted, the <i>Kodiak Daily Mirror</i> agreed to publish the weekly lessons in its Friday edition. In recent years, the paper has included lesson images provided by the museum. Since 2012, the <i>Kodiak Daily Mirror</i> has also archived the lessons on its website. Other publishers have also picked up the lessons. The <i>Alaska Native News</i> has been publishing the lessons on their website since 2013.	<i>Kodiak Daily Mirror</i> 's current circulation is about 1100.
Booklet 1999	Paperback. After the program's first season, the museum published a booklet of the 52 lessons and sold it through the Alutiiq Museum Store (Steffian and Pestrikoff 1999).	1999 booklet, ca. 200 copies printed and sold
Website posts ca. 2000–present	Lessons posted to the museum's website. At first, the lessons posts included just text. By about 2005 we added photos and linked audio files to the Alutiiq words and sentences to help people practice Alutiiq pronunciations. In 2014 the program received a facelift, with a logo and a new online template.	Available for free to a global online audience. In 2019, there were 1179 lesson pageviews in 909 unique sessions.
RSS feed ca. 2006–present	A subscription service that delivers lessons to a feed on a personal computer. The original feed included text and a linked audio file. In 2017, the RSS feed began sharing the entire program podcast.	Unknown
Social media posts Facebook 2010–present Instagram 2016–present Twitter 2019–present LinkedIn 2019–present	Lessons posted to the museum's social media sites with photos and links to audio files and podcasts. The program's social media presence grew as the museum added platforms. In 2019, we adopted software that allows us to post one lesson to all platforms simultaneously.	6342 Facebook followers 1176 Instagram followers 2211 Twitter followers 68 LinkedIn followers
Book 2012	Paperback. Funding from the Kodiak Island Borough School District and the Alaska Humanities Forum allowed the museum to publish a comprehensive volume of 15 seasons' worth of lessons with introductory articles, photographs from the museum's archives, indexes in Alutiiq and English, and references.	1000 copies printed, 870 sold or distributed to date
Archive of past lessons 2012–present	A complete set of all past lessons organized and archived on the museum's website. The museum developed the archive in 2012 and has added new lessons each year. There are now more than 560 lessons in the archive, each with text, a photo, and an audio file. As we produce podcasts, we link them to the archive.	Available for free to a global online audience. In 2019 there were 16,381 archive pageviews, 16% of the museum website's total pageviews.
Podcasts 2014–present	The complete radio lessons, produced by the museum, uploaded to iTunes for free subscription.	Unknown

Note: Statistics compiled January 2020.

an Elder speaking. They can also subscribe to a full lesson podcast available for free on iTunes and available by RSS feed.

Another valuable feature of the program is an archive of all the lessons written to date, available on the museum's website. Each year the museum adds newly written lessons to the archive, which now has over 560 entries. Here, visitors can access all program resources. They can read lessons, listen to audio files of Elders saying words and sentences, play lesson podcasts, and see a picture from the Alutiiq world accompanying each lesson. The photos come from the museum's activities and archives and are another way that the museum can share collections and research. The archive is organized alphabetically by featured word (in English), but the lessons are tagged in thematic categories and searchable in Alutiiq and English. Click on the music category and you will find lessons titled "Accordion," "Baby Song," and "Drum," among others. Type the word "*taquka'aq*" or "bear" into the search box, and the website retrieves every lesson that mentions bears. The result is a miniature encyclopedia of Alutiiq culture and history, a place that compiles and summarizes information not available elsewhere and from sources that can be hard to access.

IMPACTS

It would be much easier for museum staff members to select words and record lessons, but the effort to involve culture bearers in the process has significantly improved the Alutiiq Word of the Week and promoted the museum's vision of helping the Alutiiq people know and live their culture. At its foundation, the process of developing lessons gives authority to culture bearers. It reaffirms the importance of the knowledge stored in the Alutiiq community and honors those who share. Although many remember the shame attached to speaking in Alutiiq (Hegna 2004:5; Kimura and Counciller 2009:129), the museum's language programs create a safe space for cultural expression and teaching. They also highlight the importance of Elders by sharing their knowledge and voices publicly. Elder Nick Alokli, who was born at the Alitak Cannery in 1936 and learned to speak Alutiiq by listening to his grandpa, credits participation in language research programs with enriching his senior years.

Before I started teaching [Alutiiq] I just went to work every day. I wasn't happy because I didn't do

anything else. I thought, "is this it? Is this all I'm going to do?" Now I'm happy because I teach. It gives me something to look forward to. (Hegna 2004:1)

For Alutiiq people who don't know their heritage language, in the Kodiak region and beyond, programs like the Alutiiq Word of the Week represent a powerful bridge to ancestry. Elder voices, heritage language, and cultural information ignite feelings of pride and connection. Today's Elders knew Elders of previous generations—grandparents and great-grandparents who are no longer living—whose cultural and linguistic knowledge is preserved in them (Counciller 2012:29). Alutiiq people express these feelings of connection in emails and social media posts. They share memories tied to the lessons, express excitement about the topics covered, report that they are passing the lessons to others in the Alutiiq community, talk about their experiences with the Alutiiq language, express pride in their heritage, and ask for additional information. Here are a few examples of their messages to the museum:

When I was little, we met every weekend at grandma's for *banya* [steam bath] and tea... crackers and smoked salmon were always offered and consumed with grateful gusto! Those are some of the best memories of my childhood in Kodiak. The women and children went first and then the men.

I have a half-sister whose mother is half Alutiiq, from Larsen Bay, Kodiak Island I believe. She left shortly after my sister was born... and my sister knows nothing of her heritage on that side of her biological makeup. I pass along the word of the week each week to her.

I enjoy the word of the week. My nephew in Seattle has it on his phone and he also enjoys it with his family.

Thank you for keeping us so well informed. I live in Illinois and Aleuts are few and far between out here!⁴

It is awesome to know I have walked these places and we are reclaiming our heritage.

From a broader perspective, the program builds community knowledge of the Alutiiq world. When the museum opened in 1995, the Alutiiq were poorly known. The rapid conquest of their homeland by Russian traders led to an early and profoundly disruptive period of cultural change. Losses of political sovereignty and economic self-sufficiency, combined with catastrophic loss of life and

assimilative colonial policies, suppressed the transmission of Alutiiq cultural knowledge and hid Alutiiq traditions from view. One of the museum's long-term efforts has been to reawaken awareness of Alutiiq heritage in the Kodiak community, to combat misunderstanding and promote cultural celebration. Most of the museum's programs have contributed to this work, but the Alutiiq Word of the Week has been a particularly valuable tool. It has helped the museum broadly and publicly share learning from academic research and increase access to collections. The program provides an ongoing forum to tell Alutiiq stories, combat stereotypes, and even address community issues like land ownership, changing environments, and cultural perspectives on homosexuality.

The impacts discussed above, on both Alutiiq people and the non-Native community, reflect important characteristics of the Alutiiq Word of the Week. First, the program is easy to access. Anyone can enjoy the lessons in private and in a comfortable format. The lessons are free and available in audio, print, and digital formats (Table 1). Whether you like to read the newspaper or listen to podcasts, there is a program version for you.

Lath Carlson, the keynote speaker at the 2015 Museums Alaska conference, argued that museums can feel unsafe. Museums have rules about noise, touching, checking belongings, paying admission, and more that can make people feel uneasy about visiting. Beyond rules, visitors worry about what they will find in museum galleries. Will they be welcomed? Will they understand exhibits? Will they feel embarrassed or uneducated? A 2013 community survey illustrated that the Alutiiq Museum faces some of these challenges. People are interested in local history, archaeology, and traditional lifeways, but they wonder if they will feel welcome in a Native museum. Others fear they will feel shame about historical atrocities or for not knowing more about their ancestral culture. One of the reasons the Alutiiq Word of the Week program has been effective is that it is not in the museum. You don't need to enter a gallery to hear it or read it. People can explore the program in their own space and at their own pace. Moreover, the program's friendly tone sets people at ease and invites learning. As Hegna (2004:11) points out, the weekly lessons are designed to promote language familiarization, not acquisition. They are a starting point for discovery. A program user confirms this value of this approach.

My hope is to share my language with people. Unfortunately, I am not a fluent speaker. The good news is that today the Alutiiq people have a ton of resources to learn from. My favorite (outside of my late grandparents) has always been "Alutiiq Word of the Week" because it's not too overwhelming and gives me a week to practice...⁵

Second, by Kodiak standards, the program reaches a huge audience and has been doing so for over two decades (Table 1). Through the radio broadcast, the newspaper article, and the museum's digital resources, each weekly lesson reaches several thousand people. Sharing by other organizations adds to the program's reach. The museum decided early on that it was important to connect the lessons with the largest possible audience. As such, we've encouraged people to use and redistribute the content. In 2012, we provided the Kodiak Island Borough School District with a file containing all lessons from the first 15 years of the program to distribute to educators. For the past six years, the Alaska Native News has been reposting the lessons on its website. Prince William Sound College, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Two Spirit Journal (Pruden 2016), and the University of Alaska Museum of the North have also shared lessons, as have many followers of the museum's social media sites. Today you can also find the Word of the Week cited in academic research (Stevens 2014:87), listed as a resource for completing Girl Scout merit badges, tagged on Pinterest, and shared in the University of Northern Iowa's Living Arctic exhibit.

Finally, the lesson content is fresh, engaging, and sometimes unexpected. The goal of the program has been to share all things Alutiiq. This means infusing the lessons with both cultural knowledge and Alutiiq values like humor and resourcefulness. This starts discussions. A lesson on the word *kinguq*—worm, with the sentence *Tawa kingugturningaitua!*, "No, I won't eat this worm!"—prompted a note from a well-meaning colleague. The writer felt that the sentence was obscure and not an effective language learning tool. Who would ever say such a thing? We saw it as an example of Alutiiq humor. Other lessons feature challenging information. A lesson on *aakanag*—old fish—discussed traditional uses of spawned-out salmon. Many people consider such fish inedible, but Alutiiq Elders recognize them as a valuable food source that can be harvested in winter. In a spawned-out salmon some people see fertilizer. An Alutiiq Elder sees a meal. The *aakanag* lesson illustrates how people view and interact

with the world differently, and it encourages reconsideration of assumptions.

It is difficult to measure community change, or the Alutiiq Word of the Week's possible contributions to such change. However, 25 years after the Alutiiq Museum's founding, there are meaningful signs of increasing cultural awareness in Kodiak's non-Native community. The visitor's guide, which once opened with a discussion of Russian conquest, now includes a summary of Native history, introductions to village communities, and photos of Alutiiq people and traditions. Similarly, recent displays at Kodiak Airport, the Kodiak Public Library, and a local bank share Alutiiq traditions and images. The school district now holds Alutiiq culture weeks and Alutiiq language classes, and it is training educators to integrate cultural arts instruction into classroom lessons. Kodiak College has an Alutiiq studies program with a dedicated assistant professor. And in 2018, the City of Kodiak worked with the Alutiiq Museum to transform a downtown lot into the Alutiiq Ancestors' Memorial—a public park honoring the Alutiiq people. The Alutiiq Word of the Week did not create these changes, but it is an example of how museum-based language programming can help to expand cultural dialogue—even one word at a time.

ENDNOTES

1. The archaeological site names developed by Elders are newly coined terms recorded in the museum's technical survey reports and reported to the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey at the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology. For example, in 2019 Alutiiq Museum archaeologists documented an intertidal stone fish trap in Afognak Island's Long Lagoon (AFG-370). After reviewing photos and discussing the feature, Elders gave it the name *Saputag*, meaning fence. They named an adjacent settlement (AFG-377) *Igya'ag*—throat/outlet—for its strategic location at the entrance to a lagoon (Steffian and Saltonstall 2019:19). These names do not represent long-recognized place names. Rather, they extend the privilege of naming ancestral properties to Native Elders, promote the use of Alutiiq terms for Alutiiq cultural properties, express the connection people feel to these properties, and support the use of the Alutiiq language (Counciller 2015:347). The process connects the living language

and culture of the Alutiiq people to ancestral settlements whose histories are beyond modern memory.

2. Grepstad includes the Alutiiq Museum in his catalog of language museums. His e-book is available for download at https://www.aasentunet.no/filestore/PDF/Talar_og_artiklar/814-20180314Language-museumsOG.pdf.
3. The Alutiiq Museum's founding and sustaining Native organizations include the Kodiak Area Native Association, the nonprofit social service provider for the Kodiak region, as well as seven Native corporations established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971: Afognak Native Corporation, Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc.; Koniag, Inc.; Leisnoi, Inc.; Natives of Kodiak, Inc.; Old Harbor Native Corporation; and Ouzinkie Native Corporation.
4. Native people on Kodiak sometimes used the term *Aleut* as a self-designator, a term introduced by Russian traders. *Alutiiq* is how people say Aleut in Kodiak's Native language. It is the Native way of pronouncing the Russian-introduced word *Aleut*. The terms reflect the region's complex Native and Russian history.
5. A "week to practice" refers to the museum's weekly publication of word of the week lessons. Patrons have a week to practice pronouncing the featured word before a new lesson becomes available.

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