

This allocation supports AAC's engagement in advancing the Arctic Council-wide initiatives, co-led by AAC and Canada, to operationalize the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) across Arctic Council processes, including:

- To ensure the attendance and engagement of AAC representatives in international research and projects affiliated with the Arctic Council.
- To facilitate greater communication between Indigenous Peoples' Organizations active at the Arctic Council with the wider Arctic science community in Canada.
- To report on the engagement of the AAC at the Arctic Council, noting achievements in the progress of the UNDRIP initiative, and informing the Canadian science community of notable research, projects, and literature.

The noting of the UNDRIP in the Reykjavik Agreement and its inclusion in the Arctic Council's 10-year Strategic Plan offers a timely opportunity to further the interests and engagement of Indigenous Peoples in the research and decisions taken within the Arctic Council. This funding ensures that Permanent Participants' priorities, particularly the integration of Indigenous Knowledge and rights-based governance remain central within Arctic Council activities.

Academic/Scientific Observer Representation

AINA has successfully secured Observer representation across ACWGs: the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), and Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF).

- Bridget Lacroque, social science researcher at Trent University has joined as an AINA Observer to the SDWG. A social science researcher at Trent University, specializing in northern and Indigenous governance, Arctic institutions, and Indigenous economic and political systems, she is a recognized expert in northern and Indigenous affairs, with direct experience contributing to the Arctic Council, its working groups, and related processes and affiliated international Arctic research bodies. She is actively engaged in SDWG-related projects, notably the Arctic Food Innovation Cluster (AFIC) and the AFIC–Water–Energy–Food (WEF) Nexus study in northern Canada, led by Dr. David Natcher (University of Saskatchewan). Bridget previously served as a researcher with the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC) and as the 2024 Interim Chair of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) Standing Committee on Indigenous Involvement bringing valuable experience and expertise to strengthen academic informed engagement through an Indigenous lens within the SDWG. Other notable contributions include written input to the June 2020 briefing for Senior Arctic Officials on COVID-19 impacts in the Arctic and contributed research and analysis to *The Economy of the North* (ECONOR) 2020 and the SDWG ECONOR 2025 reports, supporting evidence-based policy development within the SDWG.

- Srijak Bhatnagar represents AINA as an Observer to CAFF. His transdisciplinary research operates at the interface of natural and social sciences, with implications for Indigenous data and food sovereignty, Indigenous governance, and international law in the Arctic. As a marine microbial biogeographer studying the Arctic marine environment to understand ecosystem-scale responses to the climate emergency and impacts on marine food webs, Srijak is using continental-scale DNA sequencing, and contributing to the development of a Microbial Atlas of the Arctic Ocean—from sea ice to seafloor—to identify microbial diversity, characterize biogeochemical functions, and assess ecosystem vulnerability to global warming. Complementary to this research, he is a molecular methods specialist and science communicator developing community-driven frameworks for the use of DNA-based technologies to monitor Arctic biodiversity across microbial, aquatic, terrestrial, and macrobiological systems.
- Jean Holloway represents AINA as an Observer to PAME and participation in its Shipping Expert Group. Her work closely aligns with the mandates of PAME and the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) Working Group through long-standing involvement in Arctic shipping, contaminants, climate and environmental change, and Indigenous-partnered research. As a chapter co-lead for the upcoming AMAP SICCA Assessment, contributing to international synthesis on the societal impacts of marine transportation and climate change, Jean research portfolio directly supports the objectives of PAME around safe, sustainable Arctic shipping, including Jean’s co-leadership of *Sustainable Arctic Shipping Knowledge Exchange*, *Inuit Qaujisarnirmut Pilirijjutit on Arctic Shipping Risks*, *Sustainable Human Use of the Arctic Marine Environment*, and the *Clean Arctic Shipping Initiative (CASI)*, all of which integrates Inuit knowledge, AIS vessel data, sea-ice analytics, and risk mapping to inform marine governance in Inuit Nunangat. In addition, Jean’s work strongly contributes to AMAP’s focus on monitoring (e.g. contaminants and climate change), including projects on microplastics, biofouling, hull-coating ablation, permafrost thaw-driven contaminant transport and carbon and nitrogen cycling.

Together, these individuals ensure subject-matter continuity across biodiversity, marine governance, sustainable development, and shipping policy domains.

AINA continues to proactively engage with Permanent Participants based in Canada to identify potential Observer nominations and to clarify how the ArcticNet-AINA ACWG Observer Support Initiative can most effectively support their participation priorities. AINA recognizes that each Permanent Participant organization operates within distinct governance structures and capacity considerations, and accordingly has sought to maintain flexible, responsive communication. Through continued outreach and coordination, AINA remains committed to ensuring that the Initiative substantively advances Permanent Participant engagement within Arctic Council Working Groups and affiliated processes, consistent with the intent and objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Recent Engagements

In February 2026, AINA's project coordinator, for the ACWG Observer Support Initiative, Kimberly Aiken traveled to Tromsø, Norway, to attend Arctic Frontiers 2026 with scheduled engagement in:

- Participation in the Senior Arctic Official (SAO) Chair Observer meeting on 5 February 2026,
- Participation in an informal meet and greet with the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples Secretariat and Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council
- Attendance at Canadian-relevant side events hosted by the Canadian Ambassador to Norway on 2- February 2026 to support AINA's observer engagement objectives
- Attendance at Arctic Council-linked events
- Side engagement with representatives from ICC Canada and Alaska, GCI, and AAC regarding the ACWG Observer Support Initiative

Confirmed and Expected Engagement (February-September 2026)

AINA Observer representation is confirmed or anticipated at the following:

Working Group Plenary Meetings (virtual)

- PAME expert group pre-meetings & Working Group Plenary: 23 February – 1 March 2026
Jean Holloway + Kimberly Aiken (acting Head of Delegation)
- CAFF Working Group Plenary: March 5, 9, and 10, 2026
Srijak Bhatnagar + Kimberly Aiken (acting Head of Delegation)
- EPPR Working Group Plenary: 18-19 March 2026
Maribeth Murray, Head of Delegation + Kimberly Aiken (HoD +1)
- SDWG Plenary: 11-12 March 2026
Bridget Lacroque + Kimberly Aiken (acting Head of Delegation)
- ACAP Plenary Meeting: 27-28 April 2026
Maribeth Murray, Head of Delegation + Kimberly Aiken (HoD +1)

Arctic Science Summit Week (Aarhus, Denmark)

AINA Observer participation is expected in:

- 27 March | AMAP POPs Expert Group Temporal Trends Workshop
- 27 March | Arctic Council Kingdom of Denmark Chairship Event: *Melting of the Arctic – The Way Ahead for Arctic Council Work on Climate Change*
- 29 March | Joint AMAP–CAFF Workshop: *Arctic Climate Feedbacks and Biodiversity*

Additional Anticipated Engagement

- Arctic Council Kingdom of Denmark Chairship event on *Advancing sustainable economic development and cruise ship incidents*
- Arctic Council Kingdom of Denmark Chairship *Ocean Connectivity Conference* 26-28 May 2026 in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands
- Arctic Circle Assembly 8-10 October 2026 in Reykjavik, Iceland

Previous Working Group Meeting attendance & participation (virtual)

- AMAP Working Group Webinar Series I: November 19, 2025
AMAP Observer activities/interests in equitable Indigenous participation and meaningful engagement in Arctic research
- AMAP 38TH Working Group Plenary Meeting: November 24-26, 2025 (virtual)
Kimberly Aiken (acting Head of Delegation)
- AMAP Webinar Series I: February 11, 2025
AMAP Observer activities on plastic pollution
- CAFF Webinar: January 15, 2026
The changing Arctic landscape, sea ice retreat, tundra, greening, and wildfires
- CAFF Webinar: February 12, 2026
Arctic ecosystems in a changing climate: Advances in hydroclimate-ecosystem dynamics, dust interactions, and methane vulnerability

Participation in these activities enhances AINA's standing as a credible and engaged Arctic Council Observer, facilitating knowledge exchange, supporting Working Group outputs, and reinforcing Canada's scientific and Indigenous-informed contributions to Arctic Council work.

Year 1 Outlook

As the ArcticNet–AINA ACWG Observer Support Initiative advances through its pilot year, AINA will continue to prioritize sustained and visible engagement across Arctic Council Working Groups and

Chairship activities while strengthening coordination with Permanent Participants based in Canada. Year 1 has focused on establishing credible Observer representation, advancing Indigenous-informed participation, and ensuring alignment with priority issue areas including the marine environment, biodiversity, and sustainable development.

Looking ahead, AINA will refine its participation framework to ensure strategic deployment of resources, enhanced knowledge transfer to the Canadian research community, and continued reporting to ArcticNet. Through continued outreach, structured representation, and careful budget stewardship, AINA remains committed to reinforcing Canada's constructive and inclusive presence within Arctic Council processes.