

ISSUE BRIEF :

Workforce

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Essential Questions

How can the necessary workforce be developed? How should mineral development be advertised to attract quality talent? How can educational institutions play a role? What community investments promote workforce development?

Key Findings

- Mining must be clearly linked with environmental sustainability to attract a talented workforce. Mining can be portrayed as a sector where people can positively impact emissions.
- Companies must support development of community infrastructure in addition to the mining projects. This may include transportation networks, communications networks, and energy infrastructure.
- Cooperation in the North American Arctic, amongst Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, can spur increased collaboration and workforce flow for mining projects.

Policy Recommendations

- Universities and other educational institutions should create programs focused on mining and coordinate with existing projects and developers.
- Projects should prioritize hiring local workers to the project itself and all secondary services. Interagency partners that are tasked with leading mineral development can make funding assistance contingent on reaching certain thresholds of employing local workers.

Focus Group Synopsis

Three main themes arose during the Workforce Development focus group: how projects and companies can advance workforce development; how to develop the workforce within communities, and how infrastructure and international cooperation can advance workforce development.

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An understanding of how mineral production in the North American Arctic differs from similar projects in the lower 48 is needed, especially the impacts of hyper-rurality on the workforce. In particular, workforce gaps should be addressed with accurate estimates and realistic employment targets. One current issue is outflow of human capital—so providing employees new opportunities within companies can aid in retaining the necessary workforce. More broadly, mining must be shared as an opportunity to positively impact emissions—innovation in mining can help work towards a greener economy. Linking mining with environmental sustainability should be broadcast to younger generations.

Companies can help bring financial gain into communities by assisting development of local infrastructure and resources. Employing local workers with lucrative, high-paying jobs will keep the community involved. Funding state, local, and Tribal educational resources will also create a regular inflow of an educated workforce—though these educational resources must be broad in scope because mining has a multi-step supply chain.

International cooperation can ensure a stable supply of skilled human capital as well as provide more resource access. For example, the lack of border infrastructure between Alaska and Canada reduces cooperation and information flow; governments should consider a fast-track process for cross-border movement for people with skillsets applicable to mining. Better base infrastructure can also attract a better workforce, through easier transportation and better living conditions.

This brief draws from discussions at a July 2023 conference on Arctic mineral development, hosted by the Wilson Center, University of Alaska, the U.S. Department of Energy's Arctic Energy Office, and RAND Corporation. These findings are from the Workforce Development focus group, as well as related points discussed during five other focus groups focused on Community Ownership, Infrastructure, Supply Chains, Regulatory Frameworks, and Financing.

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