

# INDIGENOUS PLACE NAMES PROJECT

A MOVEMENT TO BRING DENA'INA CULTURE TO OUR  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE NAME SIGNAGE

A Step Towards Honoring the Dena'ina Landscape of the Anchorage Area



ALASKA  
NATIVE  
HERITAGE  
CENTER



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This project was created on Dena’ina land.

## THE DENA’INA INDIGENOUS PLACE NAMES

Indigenous place names encompass our relationship with the land. It is a story of our interaction and understanding of the animals, plants and waters of an environment. For thousands of years, the Dena’ina peoples have and continue to steward and care for this place. The Indigenous Place Names Project is a step towards recognizing and honoring the Dena’ina language, knowledge and innovations in Alaska.

Organizational Project Host	Anchorage Park Foundation
Organizational Contributors	Anchorage Museum Alaska Native Heritage Center
Advisory Committee	Aaron Leggett, Anchorage Museum and Committee Chair Amy Coffman, Municipality of Anchorage Dr. Angela Michaud, Southcentral Foundation Barbara Donatelli, Cook Inlet Region, Inc. Beth Nordlund, Anchorage Park Foundation Carol Gore, Cook Inlet Housing Authority Diana Rhoades, Anchorage Park Foundation Forrest Dunbar, Anchorage Assembly Member and APF Board Member Francisca Demoski, Bristol Bay Native Corporation Jaylene Peterson-Nyren, Southcentral Foundation Joe Linden, Southcentral Foundation Josh Durand, Anchorage Parks and Recreation Kelsey Potdevin, Alaska Federation of Natives and APF Board Member Liz La quen náay Medicine Crow, First Alaskans Institute Dr. Robert Onders, Alaska Pacific University Roy Agloinga, Rasmuson Foundation Sarah Barton, Providence Alaska Region Board Shyanne Beatty, Alaska Native Heritage Center Tyler Robinson, Cook Inlet Housing Authority Valarie Clark, Alaska Native Heritage Center Veri DiSuvero, Municipality of Anchorage
Project Team	Joel Isaak – Project Artist, Independent Artist Melissa Shaginoff – Project Artist, Independent Artist Michael Fredericks – Facilitator, SALT Holly Spoth-Torres- Project Management, Huddle AK Bri Keifer – Project Designer, Huddle AK



# THE BEGINNING OF A MOVEMENT

In 2018, the Anchorage Park Foundation received a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation to begin work on a parks and trails indigenous place names project. The project aims to creatively, accurately, and beautifully highlight the culture and history of Anchorage and our indigenous people.

Soon after the project began, it became clear that parks and trails signage is a contributor and catalyst to a larger movement of Indigenous Place Naming. Being a part of Anchorage's Indigenous Place Naming Movement means that you invest in changing the paradigm. Signage is one physical representation of this shift, but there is also a shift in processes, recording, mapping, experiencing, and celebrating.

From this project, we've learned that to change the paradigm and create a city that honors the Indigenous Place, there must be three components:

1. **The leadership of a local culture bearer;**
2. **Advisory oversight from a broad base of stakeholders; and**
3. **Involvement of an Indigenous artist if it is appropriate to the project.**

It is the combination of these three elements that allow a project to become part of a Movement and live beyond initial contributors to the next generation of our community.







CONTENT

PROJECT PROCESS

PROJECT BRAND

SIGNAGE DESIGN

LOCATION MAPS

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE BEYOND THE SIGN

# INDIGENOUS PLACE NAMES SIGNAGE PROJECT PROCESS

Building on the three components of the Movement, the project team reached out to local Dena’ina culture bearer Aaron Leggett, Curator of Alaska History and Culture at the Anchorage Museum. Aaron has been invested in revitalizing Dena’ina Place names since 2005 with the naming of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council Natu Building and the Dena’ina Convention Center.

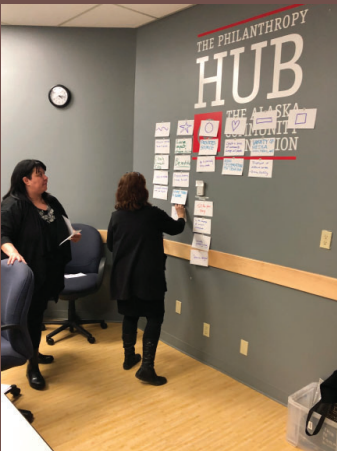
To develop interpretive signage with broad stakeholder input and guidance, the project team assembled an Advisory Committee. The Committee, led by Aaron, represents strong connections to the Alaska Native community, partner organizations and strategic thinkers. Each committee member contributed invaluable knowledge to the project. One partner organization, the Alaska Native Heritage Center, provided NEA funding to include an Alaska Native Artist on the team. The project team enjoyed working with both Joel Isaak and Melissa Shaginoff, artists who brought the project an increased level of depth and meaning.

The committee met four times to establish the project’s Critical Success Factors, verify the place name locations, and review the design progression. The final design reflects the committee’s input, guidance, and voice. Most importantly, the process for the Indigenous Place Names project is meant to be leveraged for additional projects that honor this Dena’ina place.



# PROJECT PROCESS

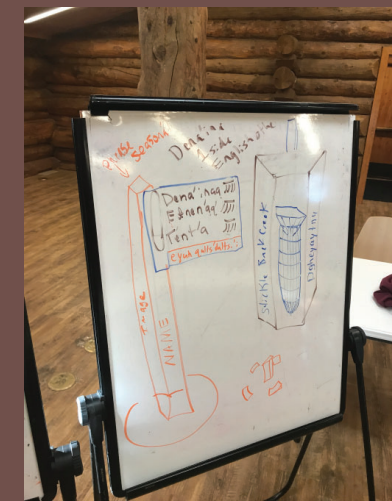
ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE  
MEETINGS



DEVELOP  
CRITICAL  
SUCCESS  
FACTORS

- 1 BE BRANDED WELL
- 2 DRAW PEOPLE TO LEARN
- 3 BE AUTHENTIC
- 4 RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE THAT THIS SITE IS DENA'INA
- 5 MOVE BEYOND THE SIGN
- 6 BE BUILT TO LAST

WORK WITH  
DENA'INA  
ARTIST TO  
CREATE  
CONCEPT



COMPLETE  
MASTER PLAN  
AND TOOLKIT

IMPLEMENT FIRST SIGNS

MOVE BEYOND THE SIGNS:  
PLACE NAMING IN ANCHORAGE  
ONLINE RESOURCES  
WALKING TOURS  
SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

# PROJECT BRAND

To measure the project’s success and set the project brand, the Advisory Committee established Critical Success Factors for the signage. Working together, the committee defined success as an Indigenous Place Names project that:

- Is well branded;
- Draws people to learn;
- Is authentic;
- Recognizes and celebrates that the site is Dena’ina;
- Moves beyond signage; and
- Is built to last.

With this clear definition of success, Joel Isaak, a Dena’ina artist, worked with the project team to create two foundational phrases for the project.

## DENA’INAQ EŁNENA CH’TİYUX

*“You are walking on Dena’ina land”*

The first phase is used to recognize and honor the importance that this is Dena’ina land.

## YE’UH QA TS’DALTS’IYI

*“Living with the outdoors”*

The second phase expands on the first. To say this is Dena’ina is complex in that land represents more than a place; land represents a way of being. The phrase is meant to evoke the complexity of place and being on the land as it relates to seasonality, resources, travel, technology, life, and spirit.

The Dena’ina fire bag was selected as the project’s symbol. Fire bags were used by the Dena’ina people to store and transport fire-making materials such as tinder and embers. The fire bag represents living with the outdoors and sharing of fire and knowledge.

To further define the project brand, the team became inspired by dentalium bead patterns. Dentalium beaded designs are used both traditionally and in contemporary clothing, materials, and artwork. For this project, dentalium bead patterns are used to represent Dena’ina fine art. The final bag and beadwork designs were created with the artistic oversight of Melissa Shaginoff, an artist familiar with the Dena’ina culture and funded through the Alaska Native Heritage Center’s NEA grant.



Dena’ina Fire Bag with Dentalium Beading, Image Source: Catalogue No. E73048, Department of Anthropology; Smithsonian



# SIGNAGE DESIGN

Based on the Critical Success Factors and the project brand, the project team developed two types of signs for different implementation opportunities.

## LEVEL 1 & 2 - DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN

The Dena'ina Place Name Sign is for places that have a Dena'ina name as shown in the Level 1 and Level 2 location maps that follow. The Place Name Signs are meant to celebrate and educate the residents and visitors of Anchorage about the significant Dena'ina Places that exist throughout the Anchorage area and beyond.

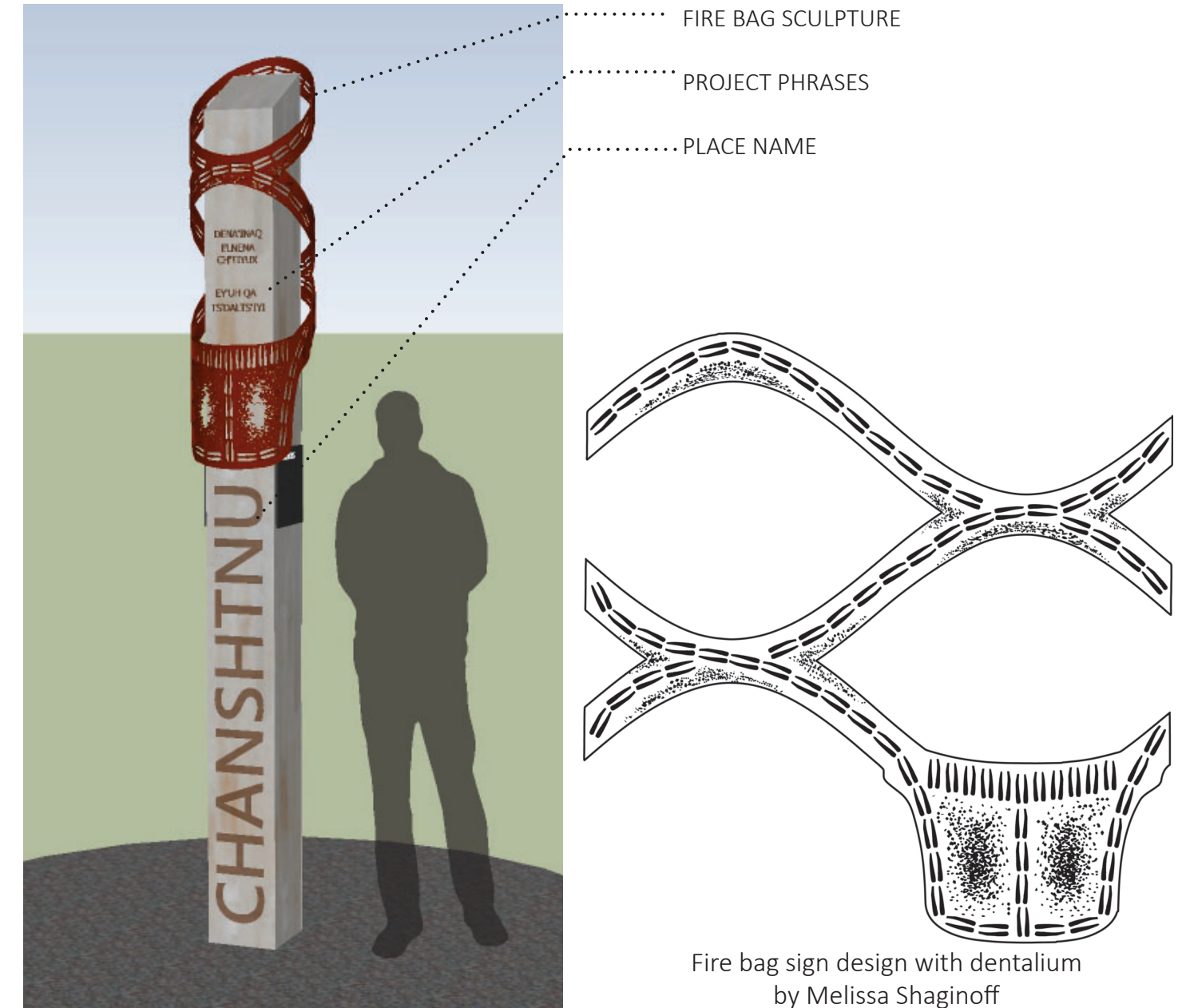
## LEVEL 1 & 2 - DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN WITH PLAZA

The design team recommends that 2 to 4 of Dena'ina Place Name signs be installed with a plaza space surrounding the sign. These should be located in popular locations where a lot of visitors and locals are expected, for example Westchester Lagoon.

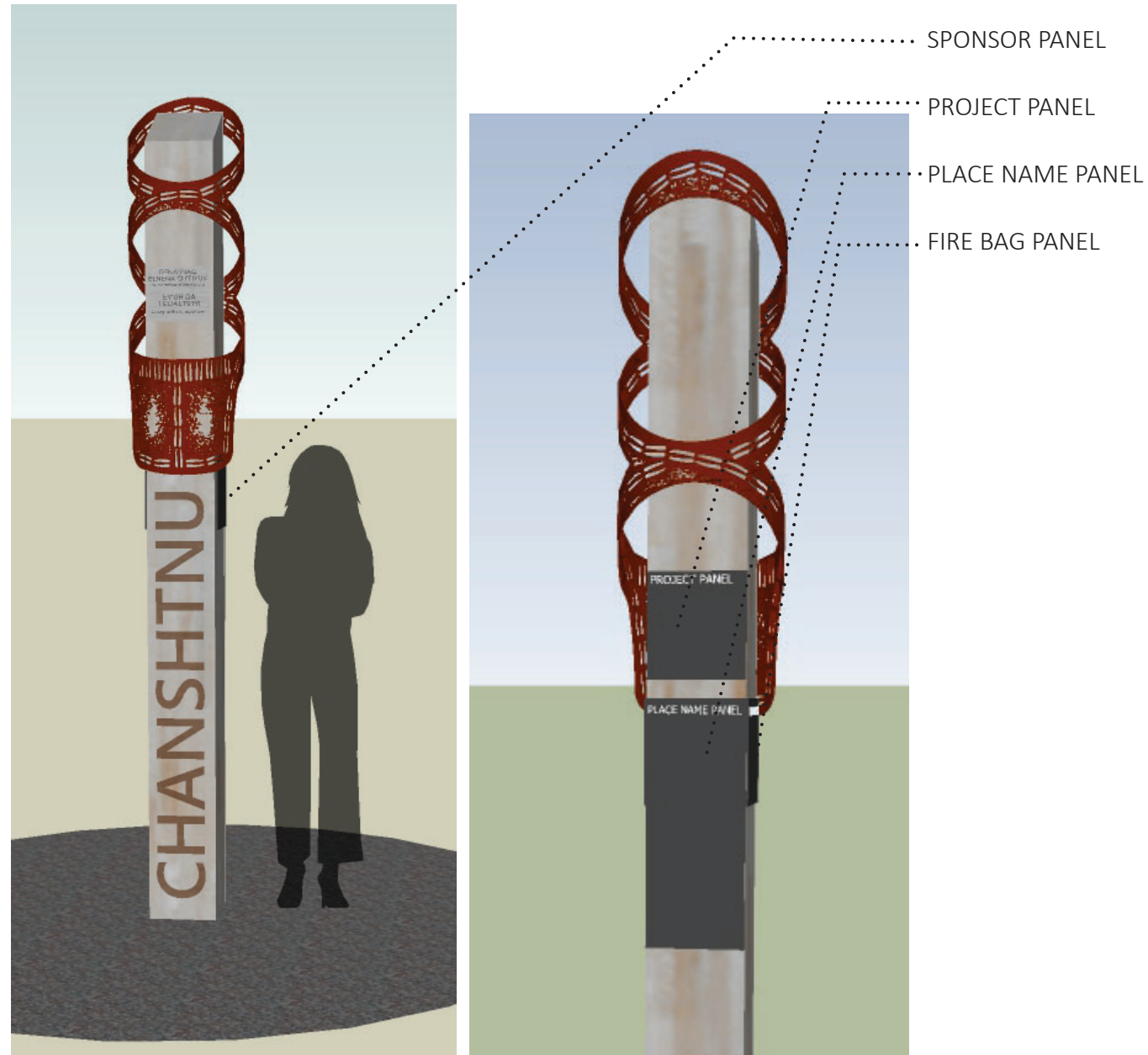
## LEVEL 3 - INTERPRETIVE OR WAYFINDING SIGN

The Dena'ina Interpretive Sign is meant to highlight cultural, scientific, or historic information not necessarily associated with a place name. For example, a sign that describes flora and fauna of the area, or a sign that tells a modern story. These signs are considered Level 3 locations. These signs are not only meant to be used as single signs for interpretive content they can also be used in an organization's wayfinding system.

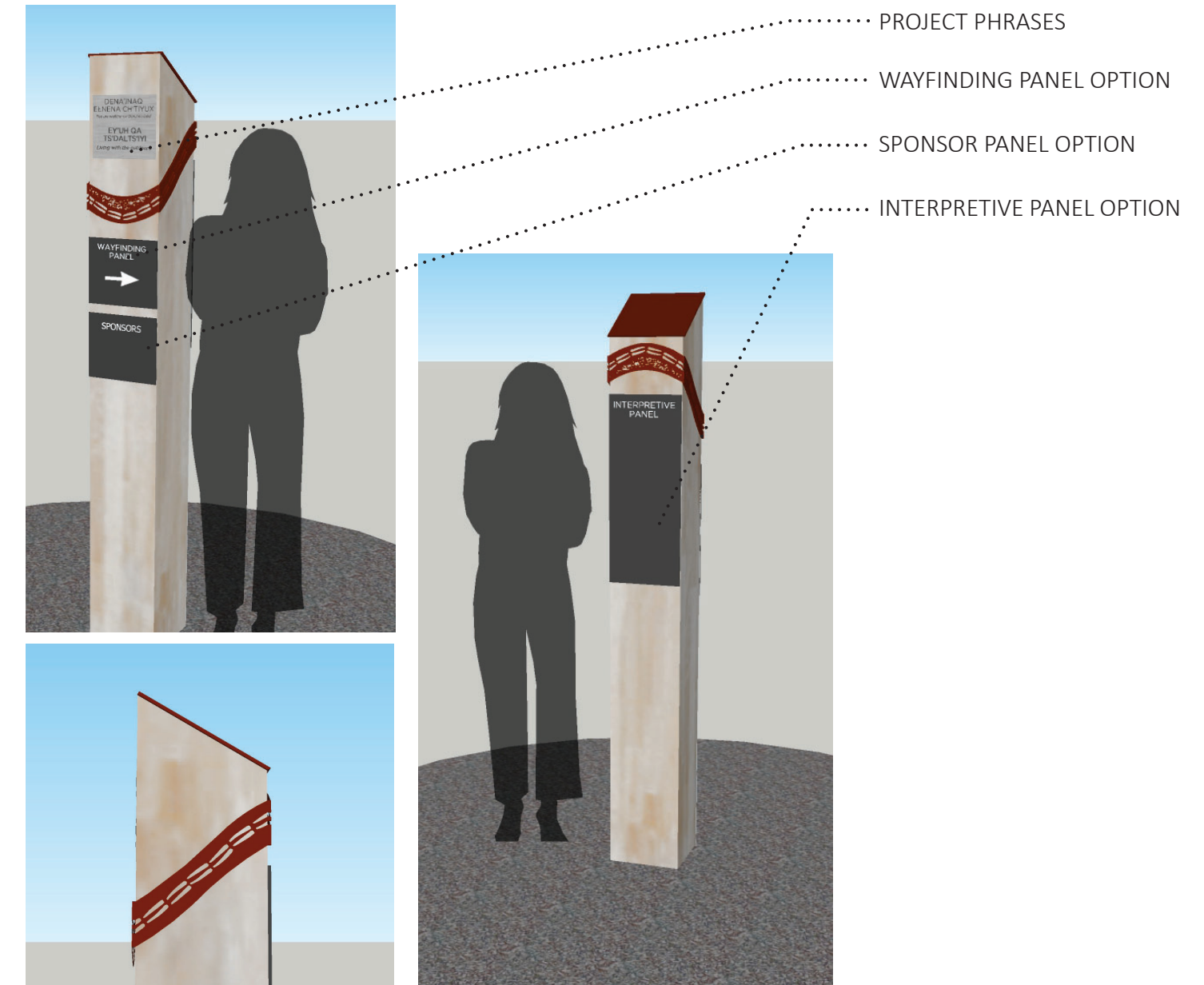
## LEVEL 1 & 2 DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN



## LEVEL 1 & 2 DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN



## LEVEL 3 INTERPRETIVE OR WAYFINDING SIGN



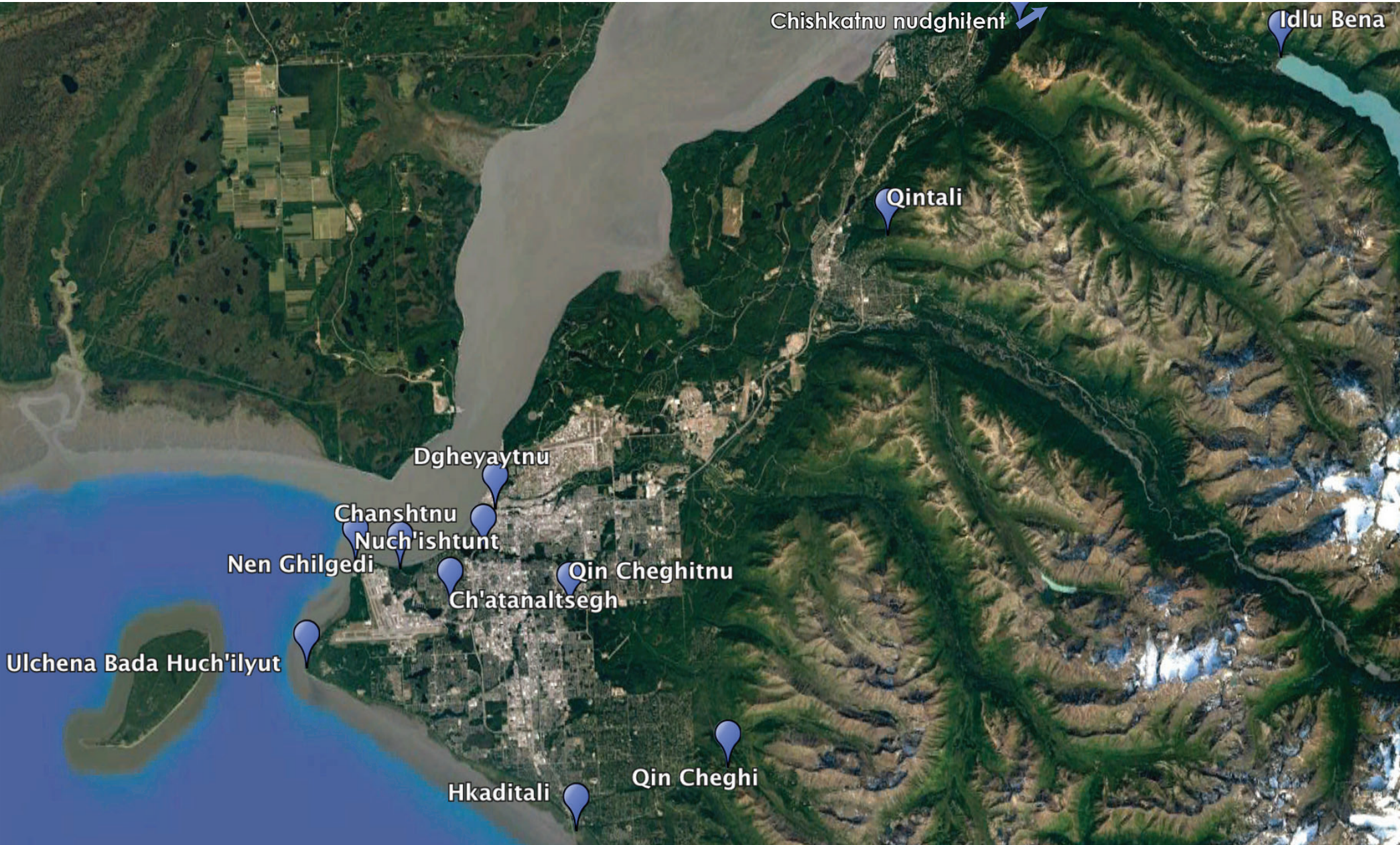


## LEVEL 1 & 2 DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN WITH PLAZA





LOCATION MAP

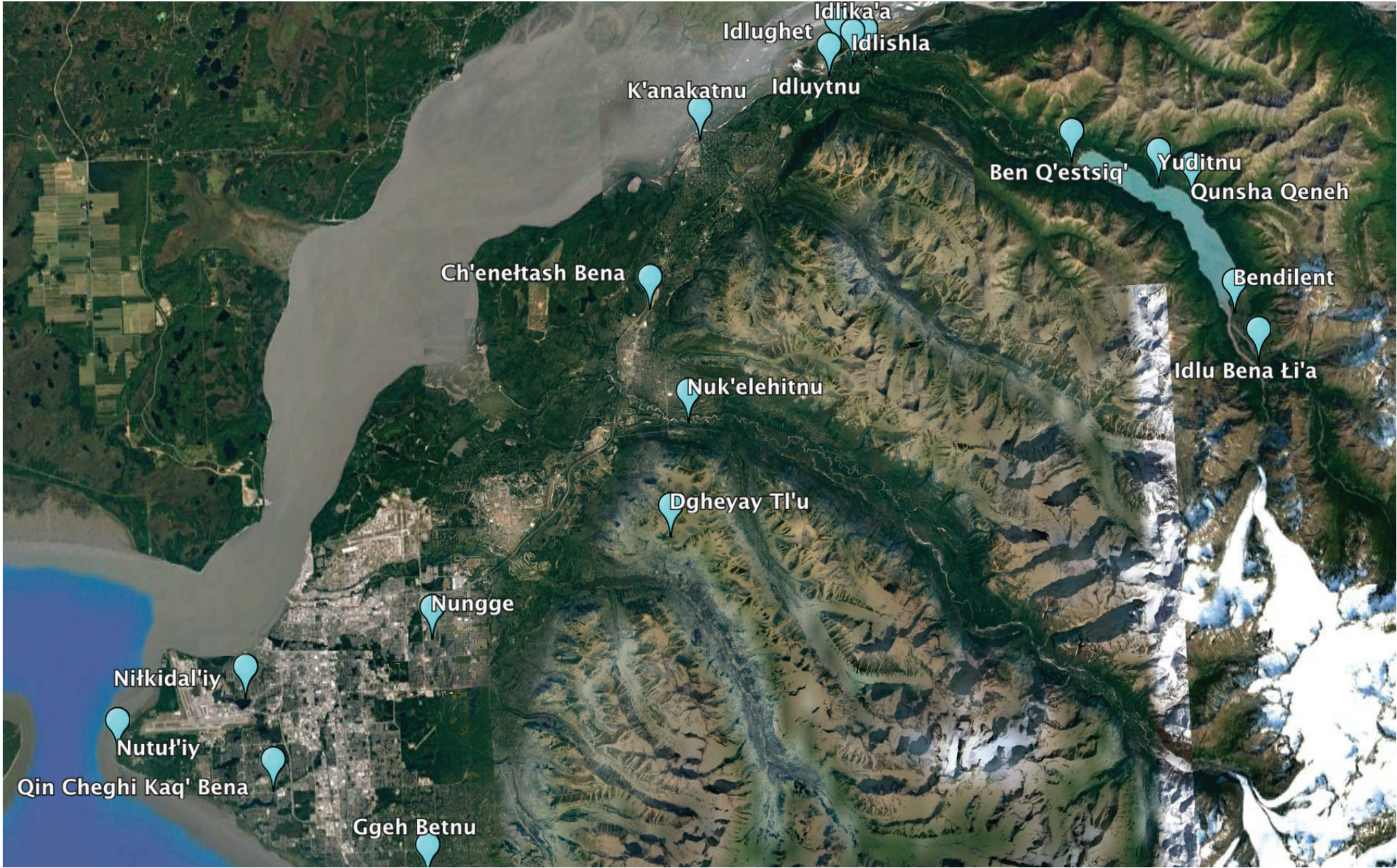


LEVEL ONE PLACE NAMES  
DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN

Denai'na Name	Location	Meaning
Dgheyaytnu	Ship Creek	A creek named after Stickleback - little fish used in soup
Chanshtnu	Chester Creek	Grassy creek
Ch'atanaltsegh	Fish Creek	Where yellow water comes out
Nen Ghilgedi	Earthquake Park	Rotten land
Nuch'ishtunt	Point Woronzof	Place protected from the wind
Ulchena Bada Huch'ilyut	Point Campbell	A battleground "where we pulled up the Aleutic's boat"
Qin Cheghi	Flattop Mountain Chugach State Park	Crying Ridge, a ridge along the north side of upper Campbell Creek near Flattop mountain
Qin Cheghitnu	Campbell Creek	The creek that comes from Crying Ridge
Hkaditali	Potter Marsh	Drift wood and other debris washed up in this area from ship wrecks
Idlu Bena	Eklutna Lake	By the two hills - two girls, lake monster
Qintali	Mount Baldy	Wide ridge
Chishkatnu nudghilent	Thunderbird Falls	Big ochre creek falls



LOCATION MAP



LEVEL TWO PLACE NAMES  
DENA'INA PLACE NAME SIGN

<i>Dena'ina Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Idlughet	Eklutna Village	Dena'ina name for Eklutna Village
Idlishla	Hill near Eklutna Village	Smaller hill of two hill's near Eklutna Village
Idlika'a	Hill near Eklutna Village	Larger hill of two hill's near Eklutna Village
Idluytnu	Eklutna River	By the two hills or plural objects River
Ben Q'estsiq'	Eklutna Lake	Lake outlet
Yuditnu	Eklutna Lake	Golden eagle creek
Qunsha Qeneh	Eklutna Lake	ground squirrel house
Bendilent	Eklutna Lake	Creek that flows off of Eklutna glacier
Idlu Bena Łi'a	Eklutna Glacier	by the plural objects lake glacier
K'anakatnu	Lower Peters Creek	No translation
Ch'eneftash Bena	Fire Lake	Creek where we sleep
Nuk'elehitnu	Eagle River	Fish run again creek
Dgheyay Tl'u	Arctic Valley	Stickleback headwaters
Nittkidal'iy	Lake Hood and Lake Spenard	The ones, the lakes that are joined together
Nutuł'iy	Fire Island	The object that stands in the water
Qin Cheghi Kaq' Bena	Campbell Lake	The mouth of crying ridge lake
Nungge	Nunaka Valley	Upland area
Ggeh Betnu	Rabbit Creek	Rabbit Creek, literal translation
Q'isqa Betnu	McHugh Creek	Temporary snowshoe
Tutl'uh	Turnagain Arm	Back water





**BECOME PART OF THE MOVEMENT**

**CATALYZE THE VISION**

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The Anchorage Park Foundation is looking for organizations and individuals who want to support both the larger movement and this specific signage project. Here are two ways to get involved:

### SPONSORSHIP

Organizations and individuals who want to support the efforts of the movement can become a movement sponsor. Their sponsorship will help support the implementation of Level 1 and 2 signs as well as other projects within the program.

### IMPLEMENT LEVEL 3 SIGNS

The level 3 signs were designed to be implemented in other organizations' projects. If you are interested in installing a level 3 sign contact the APF! They will help you through the process of implementation by making sure the right stakeholders are involved from the beginning and helping supply materials and content for construction.

**CONTACT THE ANCHORAGE PARK FOUNDATION TO GET INVOLVED!**



# OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE BEYOND THE SIGN

Having established a process, created Critical Success Factors and developed a brand, the project has the foundational elements move beyond the place-based signage.

## DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Through their seat on the Advisory Committee, Bristol Bay Native Corporation provided an excellent example of how this Indigenous Signage Project might become a digital mapping opportunity. Their Bristol Bay Online project is intended to help collect, preserve and increase accessibility to Native place names information for the people of Bristol Bay. The GIS mapping database allows users to view the place name location, learn the name in several languages, and hear an audio guide to their pronunciation.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Place-based signage provides the perfect opportunity to create a school curriculum partnership. The team has identified eleven indigenous, place-based locations as the first level of installation effort. Each site is associated with existing parks and trails and would provide the perfect backdrop to Alaska history in schools.

## TOUR APPS

In 2015 the Municipality of Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department created a signage and wayfinding plan to improve trails for all users. The Indigenous Place Names project builds off this plan to add similarly, yet distinctly branded signage to the greater network of signage. Once implemented, this network provides a physical platform for a walking tour smartphone application that visitors and residents can use to learn about Dena'ina culture.

## OTHER PLACE NAME PROJECTS

There are Indigenous naming initiatives bubbling to the surface all over Anchorage. This project process, the Critical Success Factors, and the efforts to date should be used to define other naming processes. For instance, the downtown community could begin a movement to create indigenous street names or signage, and the Critical Success Factors of this project could be used as a starting point for stakeholder engagement. Whatever the case, this group recommends a strong process that connects the design team or artist to a board base of the Alaska Native community for input, guidance,