



STATE OF ALASKA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**  
COMMUNITY AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Office of Economic Development

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### **Tourism Mentorship Assistance Program Brings Mentors and Entrepreneurs Together**

(Juneau) – The Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED), Office of Economic Development (OED) announces the selection of 15 participants in its Tourism Mentorship Assistance Program (TMAP). The TMAP program is an innovative business assistance program that pairs up experienced Alaskan business owners with emerging business owners who are working to start or expand tourism businesses in rural Alaska. OED has organized the launch of this year's program with an event-filled 2-day orientation meeting on January 19 and 20, 2009.

From polar bear viewing tours in Kaktovik to cultural tourism opportunities in the Lower Kuskokwim, the program's innovative entrepreneurs are engaging in a wide range of visitor activities in all corners of the state. Other emerging businesses include bed and breakfast accommodations in Glennallen and Nome (Solomon), tour guiding opportunities in Gambell and Perryville, river rafting tours along the Yukon River in Tanana, and remote wilderness lodges near Ruby and Admiralty Island.

TMAP mentors who have volunteered their time to assist the entrepreneurs also represent a broad and diverse variety of tourism activities spanning all parts of the state. Mentors come from major cities such as Anchorage and Juneau, as well as Palmer, Girdwood and Fritz Creek. These mentors have a wealth of experience running lodges, bed and breakfasts, and expedition and backcountry adventure tours.

The orientation will bring these diverse participants and their experiences together for two days of networking, one-on-one discussions, and planning for next steps in the business development stage. Mentors from Anchorage, Juneau, Palmer, Girdwood and Fritz Creek will be meeting their entrepreneurs for the first time.

Throughout the course of the program, mentoring will focus on several key areas, including business plan development, best practices, budget management, website development, funding strategies, tour packaging, and marketing. Entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and networking contacts that will greatly assist them in the final steps of launching a business.

Mentors and entrepreneurs also have the opportunity to participate in a unique cross-community exchange - visiting and observing operations at each other's business or potential business site. These site visits are a great opportunity for mentors to share their personal experiences in running a business in Alaska with their entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to receive tips and recommendations from their mentor as it relates to their specific needs. These site visits will bring emerging business owners into contact with successful tourism business models in Alaska as well as foster a greater understanding of how to resourcefully overcome the challenges tourism business owners confront in rural Alaska.

The Office of Economic Development (OED) within the Department of Commerce is launching this program with the support of a grant through the U.S. Economic Development Administration. While this program will focus on specific rural businesses, it will also create new opportunities in the community and region as a whole. Entrepreneurs have the potential to become future mentors as their businesses grow and prosper.

The OED works with local governments, regional economic development organizations (ARDOR's), regional Native organizations (regional, village, tribal), and the visitor industry to provide direct technical assistance to selected individuals who actively pursue ways to develop a local visitor industry. OED has been working with several regions of Alaska throughout the past several years (Bering Strait, Copper Valley, Lower Kuskokwim, Central Southeast) to provide technical assistance in the form of workshops and training.

Many economically distressed regions of Alaska possess immense potential for future cultural, ecotourism, and recreational opportunities. The Tourism Mentorship Assistance Program aims to tap into this potential in order to generate small-scale, sustainable tourism and visitor industry development by creating new jobs and employment opportunities for residents of bush and rural Alaska. It will promote economic growth in the state as a whole by diversifying Alaska's economy and establishing additional visitor industry/tourism-related businesses.

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