

Arctic Mayors Forum

Leadership in Action Project Report

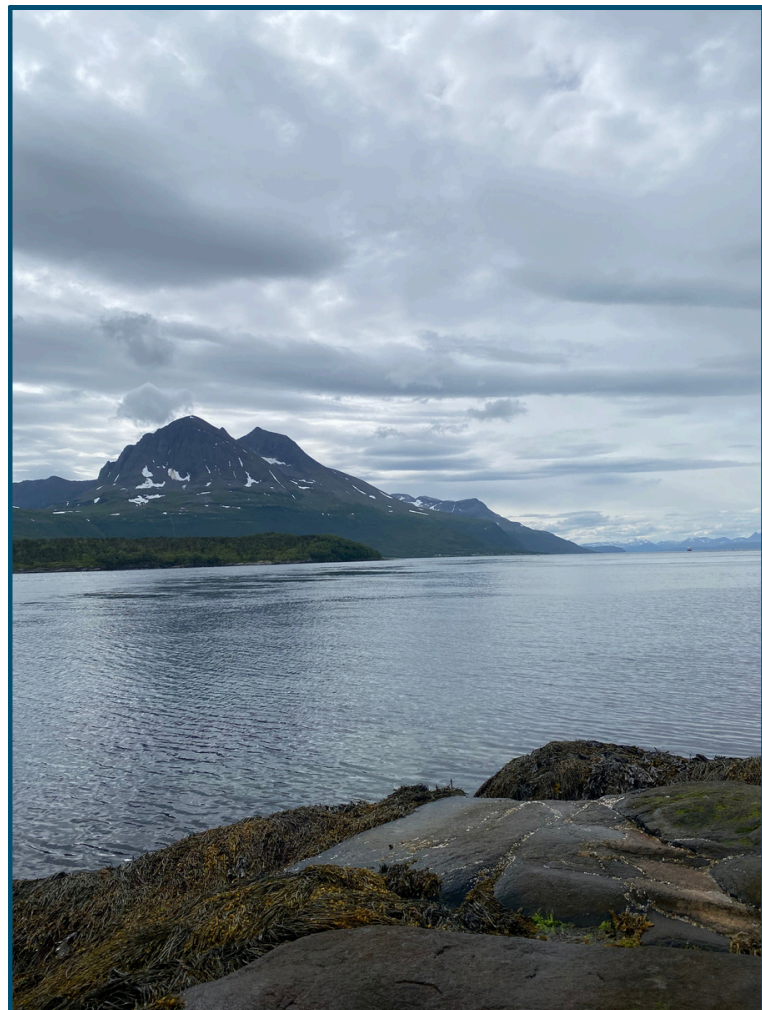
📍 Tromsø, Norway

Introduction

This summer, I traveled to northern Norway to work with the Arctic Mayors' Forum. The Arctic region is facing unique, diverse, and unprecedented challenges related to climate, economy, and security.

Working with an international organization based in the Arctic was a deeply enriching experience. I got the opportunity to live in the Arctic, learn from local and Indigenous people and leaders, and develop a strong appreciation for the region.

In this report I will explain my work at the Arctic Mayors Forum, hold myself accountable for the goals that I met and those that I did not meet, evaluate my learning and growth, and reflect on my experience.



Tromsø, Norway

About the Arctic Mayors' Forum

The Arctic Mayors' Forum is a pan-Arctic forum representing the voices of Arctic Peoples through elected leaders at the municipal and community level. It is made up of 19 member municipalities from across 7 Arctic states, and represents 1.2 million Arctic inhabitants. Until the Arctic Mayors' Forum, the Arctic governance system has offered no formalized and structured procedure for local communities to be involved on a continuous basis in Arctic policymaking.

The Arctic Mayors' Forum does work across a variety of topics including community health and wellbeing, sustainable development, attractiveness and retention, youth engagement, and working with partners.

Mission

Ensure the participation of mayors and elected community leaders at Arctic governance tables to ensure the values, goals and interests of Arctic peoples are voiced and considered.

My Work at the Forum

While at the Arctic Mayors' Forum I did a lot of random tasks for the Secretariat, and also worked on a handful of projects. As a member of the Secretariat I ran the AMF social media accounts, helped with communications, helped coordinate workshops, town halls, and conference talks, attended meetings, helped write and appeal funding applications, and worked to increase the membership of the organization.



AMF members' meeting in Tromsø City Hall, January 2020.

The projects that I worked on were geared towards Arctic youth engagement. The Arctic Policy Hackathon brings 15 youth from across the Arctic together before the Arctic Circle Assembly to discuss and develop policy recommendations. The Arctic Mentorship Program

The Arctic

Arctic communities are facing a diverse range of challenges, many of which are unique to the Arctic region. Because the Arctic Mayors' Forum works with 19 different municipalities, I got to learn about many different issues in the Arctic. I have highlighted some of the biggest issues facing the region below.

Colonization

The Arctic is the ancestral home of many Indigenous peoples, and the legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism across the Arctic continue to harm Indigenous people, land, culture, and lifestyles. Sámi people in Sápmi, which stretches across northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland continue to fight for reconciliation and land protection. Indigenous communities in the North-American Arctic are incredibly underserved, and many lack basic resources like clean drinking water, equipped hospitals, and affordable food.

Climate

The climate crisis is hitting the Arctic with incomparable intensity. Cities, like Kiruna, Sweden, have had to migrate their entire city centres to adapt to melting permafrost. Others, like Utqiagvik, Alaska, have built storm walls to protect from rising sea levels and harsh conditions. Melting sea ice and warming temperatures are impacting people and the environment deeply.

Ressources

Arctic communities are often remote, and far from the capitals of their nations. As such, there are often limited services in Arctic communities. Hospitals, universities, and other government services are often less accessible in the north. Mental health care is particularly hard to access.

Housing

Many Arctic communities are struggling to provide adequate housing for their population. In some heavily visited regions, like Tromsø, Norway, the high volume of tourists have led to more people renting AirBnBs, which has made long-term housing less accessible. In places like Pond Inlet, Canada, federal housing projects have failed to adapt to the Arctic climate, and have built homes that fail to stand up to the harsh weather conditions, making them unfit.

SMART Goals

1. Speaking with Youth from each AMF member

This was a very ambitious goal, and while I came very close, I did not meet youth from all 18 municipalities. I think I met youth from 12 of the 18 though, which is pretty good. Although I did not meet one from each member, I had the opportunity to connect with a lot of youth, and really got to hear about their experiences and their connection to the region.

2. Finalize application process for the Arctic Policy Hackathon

I was able to develop, finalize, and execute a formal application process for the Arctic Policy Hackathon, which was a fabulous experience. It allowed me to talk to many young people, and read about why they were passionate about the future of sustainable Arctic tourism, which was really interesting.

3. Finalize 5 mentors to participate in the mentorship program

In the end, this task fell onto the shoulders of my teammates who had more vast networks in the Arctic, although I supported them by brainstorming a diverse list of mentors

4. Finalize the mission/vision/values of the mentorship program

Ensure the participation of mayors and elected community leaders at Arctic governance tables to ensure the values, goals and interests of Arctic peoples are voiced and considered.

Learning and Growth

Curiosity

Working in the Arctic exposed me to a region that I was not very familiar with, but is part of my home country, and even home province. The challenges and innovative solutions being generated in the Arctic are impressive, and I have become much more curious about this region that is part of my home.

Creative Ideation

This summer really pushed my creative brain. I was working on a small team where we were constantly trying to develop creative solutions. Whether I was developing programming for the Hackathon, brainstorming a workshop, or finding funding, my creative mind was being stretched.

Humility

As a non-Arctic person, it was obvious how little I knew about the region, and it was a joy to embrace humility and really learn from Indigenous and local Arctic people, and others who have much more experience in the Arctic context. Being humble and open to learning made my experience really fulfilling.

Final reflection

I feel a lot of gratitude for my experience with the Arctic Mayors' Forum, where I was able to really explore a region that was unfamiliar to me. The experience was especially impactful as a Newfoundlander, as Labrador, the northernmost part of my province, is in the Arctic. Developing a better understanding of the challenges faced by Arctic people across the north, but also in my home country and province, was really powerful. Although I was familiar with the wealth and resource discrepancy between the far North and the rest of Canada, it was jarring to hear Northern Canadians share issues facing their communities.