



CASE STUDY – Teaching Note

The Galena Ball Field

GALENA, ALASKA FLOOD RECOVERY

Learning Objective: Discuss the benefits of a non-traditional recovery project in a rural, remote location and analyze how this community-building project contributed to overall resilience for the Galena community.

Keywords: Recovery, Flood, Local Government, Tribal Government, Rural Community, Psychological and Emotional Recovery, Natural and Cultural Resources, Philanthropy, Public Assistance, Identifying and Leveraging Resources

Instructor's Introduction

This Teaching Note is intended to prepare an instructor to use this case study in a classroom (live or virtually). The note expands on the lessons learned from this case study, which has been written to help students learn from a real-world disaster recovery experience. Selection of learning objectives, discussion questions, and activities can be customized based on audience and time allowance. The remainder of the guide provides suggestions of key concepts to explore as you teach the case. It is recommended that students read the Background and Challenges sections (Part One), and then pause to discuss the scenario before they move on to read the Actions, Results, and Lessons Learned sections (Part Two).

In May 2013, flooding from the Yukon River inundated the rural, isolated town of Galena, Alaska, forcing residents to evacuate and causing significant damage to homes and community facilities. This case study examines a unique recovery project – the restoration of an athletic field in Galena, and its associated facilities – and how its restoration contributes to the community's overall psychological recovery.

To become more familiar with relevant concepts before teaching the case, please review the following:

- [Rasmuson Foundation](#)
- [Training Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters](#)
- [Galena Making Progress in Recovery.](#)
- [Public Assistance Fact Sheet](#)

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Consider how a non-traditional recovery project can contribute to a community's overall, emotional, and cultural recovery progress.
- Analyze the benefits of restoring the Galena ball field.
- Discuss strategies, partners, and resources useful in pursuing non-traditional recovery projects that are community priorities.

Key Takeaways:

- The ball field project was a high priority for the Galena community. Its restoration provided a social meeting space and aided community cohesion and morale, contributing to the community's enthusiasm for recovery.
- Projects that do not seem to have an immediate recovery value may still contribute to recovery in unique ways.

PART ONE

Background

During the spring break up¹ in May of 2013, flood waters carrying massive ice chunks from the Yukon River inundated nearly 90% of the homes, businesses, and government facilities in the small town of Galena, Alaska. House-sized chunks of ice mowed down the native birch trees and ripped homes off of pilings. Most areas received between seven and nine feet of water. The event forced nearly all of the 472 residents to evacuate by air to Fairbanks and Anchorage as waters quickly rose and local roads became impassable.

Located roughly 270 miles due west of Fairbanks in interior Alaska, Galena is a regional education and transportation hub on the banks of the Yukon River. Its airstrip was built as a base during World War II and serves as the main method of getting in and out of Galena. Since Galena's establishment in 1918 on an Alaskan Native fishing site, the city has dealt with multiple destructive flooding events, a common issue for communities situated along the Yukon River.



Figure 2. The fence running along the Galena ball field sits ruined after the floodwaters receded.

The Galena baseball field was heavily damaged in the flood. The field served as an important outdoor recreation site for kids and families and was important to the overall well-being of the community. During the recovery process, Galena residents placed a strong community value on outdoor recreational opportunities and facilities, including trails and parks that would support culture and traditional ways of life. One of their top projects was to enhance the baseball field to make a more welcoming and family-friendly community gathering place.

The Galena ball field is located at the southeastern corner of the local airstrip. Before the flooding, the area contained a smoothed-out baseball diamond that was used for games, tournaments, and other community gatherings such as cookouts. The ball field was completely destroyed by the flooding. The field became waterlogged and all minor structures were washed away,

including the bleachers and fencing surrounding the field.

Baseball is an important pastime in Galena and the entire interior Alaska region. Many community members play baseball from a young age through adulthood, often participating in recreational leagues and pick-up games every summer. The loss of the Galena ball field also meant the loss of the annual baseball and softball tournaments, which were the backbone of cultural engagement and social interactions between the Galena community and surrounding communities up and down the river. Other tribes and communities travel to Galena from various remote locations around central Alaska for these annual social gatherings.

Given Galena's geographic isolation and the prominence of baseball as a social tradition among residents, restoring the ball field quickly became a top priority for local leadership. Restoring recreational facilities are not typically priority projects during recovery, so the Galena City Manager knew she would have to carefully advocate its importance to federal and state programs that could help fund the repairs.

"It's a small project, but it's probably got the most support and enthusiasm of any of the projects." – Jon Korta, Mayor, City of Galena

Source: "Galena Making Progress in Flood Recovery," Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, June 13, 2014

¹ The period of time in spring when the ice on the river physically breaks and the surface becomes free flowing again. Seasonal snow melt adds to the Yukon River's water level, and shifting pieces of ice pile up to create ice jams that break unpredictably.

Challenges

The land on which the ball field sits was owned by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (Alaska DOT), and for safety reasons required review before restoring the ball field because of its proximity to the Galena airstrip. Alaska DOT officials agreed to the ball field restoration project and issued an exemption to the City of Galena for the construction effort.

The recovery effort also required an expedited rebuilding process due to snow and freezing temperatures that typically begin in late September, and involved significant logistical challenges. With no road or rail system connecting Galena to other communities in Alaska, people and goods – including emergency supplies and building materials – must be brought in via barge or plane. Hundreds of contractors and volunteers arrived by air requiring temporary lodging and feeding.

Timelines were highly dependent on weather conditions, supply availability, and higher prices, which impacted the timely arrival of critical personnel and materials recovery projects were depending on.

At the same time, Galena families who rely on subsistence food also had to make time for fishing and hunting to build up their winter food stocks. To accommodate the community's priorities, Galena leadership requested that the federal Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) partners delay local engagement until after moose hunting season.

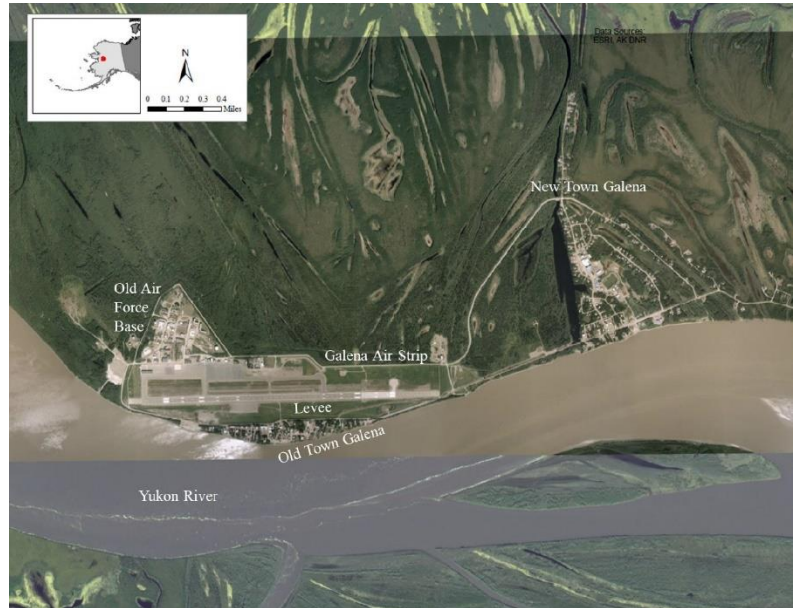


Figure 3. Map of Galena, Alaska. Source: ESRI, AK DNR data; produced by FEMA Region X.

Part One Discussion Activities

Discussion Questions:

1. In this example, the Galena community rallied behind one project that was an important morale boost for community members. In the case of a larger community where there may be multiple projects with widespread public support that contribute to the social and emotional recovery of the community, how can we support communities as they think through planning considerations and determine how to prioritize these types of projects?
2. A big challenge with this project was the ball field's proximity to the Galena air strip, as officials were concerned about potential safety issues. Imagine you were leading this recovery project. What are the benefits of restoring the ball field on that site? What are the challenges? What would be the benefits of building a new ball field on a different site? What would the challenges be?

Activity 1: Unique Recovery Benefits

Duration: 5-15 minutes

Setup: Lead a discussion with the full group about the benefits of a unique recovery project such as the Galena ball field restoration. Utilize poster paper, whiteboard, or virtual collaboration space to record participant answers.

Instructions: Ask participants to list tangible and intangible benefits the Galena community could receive from the restoration of this community facility. Lead a discussion about how these benefits can contribute to the overall recovery progress of the community.

Discussion:

1. What are some tangible benefits of a restored ball field for Galena?
2. What are some intangible benefits of a restored ball field for Galena?
3. How do these cultural and social benefits support Galena's overall community recovery?

PART TWO

Actions

The primary source of funding for direct repairs of the ball field came from the FEMA Public Assistance (PA) Program. PA funds were used to repair the existing ball field, primarily by re-grading the ballfield surface so it could be used safely for future baseball and softball events.

Additional funding came in the form of a \$25,000 grant from the Rasmuson Foundation, an organization focused specifically on improving the quality of life of Alaskans. The Denali Commission, an independent federal agency created by Congress to improve living conditions throughout Alaska, was instrumental in connecting Galena leadership with the funding opportunity at the Rasmuson Foundation.

Though the Rasmuson Foundation typically would not fund this type of project, the significant damage caused by the flood, combined with the importance of the ball field to the Galena community, convinced the foundation that this project should be a high priority. The grant money was used to add bleachers, picnic tables, a small gazebo and picnic pavilion, and a playground to the ball field site.

Results

The loss of the ball field meant the loss of a main source of recreation and fun in the community. Given the prevalence of baseball among the Galena community, the absence of the ball field resulted in a significant drop in morale among community members throughout the rebuilding effort. The restoration and improvement of the ball field was essential to restore morale and bring the community together to successfully recover from the flood's impacts. Recreation is also an important long-term strategy that can help survivors overcome disaster-related stress.

Since its restoration, the ball field has hosted several baseball and softball tournaments for the school, the community, and the local baseball league. In addition, the facility improvements, including the picnic pavilion, playground, and gazebo, have transformed the ball field into a larger and more versatile community gathering space. The community recently held a fundraiser at the baseball field to assist a local family with unexpected medical expenses.

Lessons Learned

The ball field restoration project was of great importance to Galena residents because of its ability to facilitate community gatherings and recreational opportunities. Resiliency and post-disaster recovery depend heavily on a sense of community and feelings of health and safety. The ball field project was an important step in restoring that sense of community within the town of Galena. Other rural communities facing significant recovery challenges may look to the Galena ball field project as an example of a non-traditional recovery initiative that greatly contributed to the long-term resiliency of the disaster-affected community.

Key Partners

- Galena Leadership
- FEMA
- State Leadership
- Denali Commission
- Rasmuson Foundation



Figure 4. The finished picnic pavilion at the ball field site.

Part Two Discussion Activities

Discussion Questions:

1. A key grant for the ball field restoration came from a foundation focused on interior Alaskan communities. How can federal interagency recovery support staff identify these types of unique recovery resources and partnerships to fund recovery projects? In your role, how would you contribute to this process?

Teaching Note: One method available to federal interagency recovery support staff is utilizing the Tracking Recovery Application Exchange (MAX-TRAX) on MAX.gov to increase situational awareness of all recovery projects among field staff and better coordinate federal recovery efforts. For more information on accessing MAX-TRAX, please contact traxsupport@max.gov.

Activity 2 (Optional): Resource and Stakeholder Mapping

Duration: 30-35 minutes

Setup: Divide participants into small groups of 2-4 individuals. Provide each group with scrap paper to write on, or a virtual collaboration space if students are working remotely.

Instructions: Instruct each group to create a list/map of resources, stakeholders, and other factors necessary to push this ball field project forward. Which stakeholders need to be involved at a federal, state, and local level? Which stakeholders should be informed of project progression? What resources are available at the federal, state, local, or private sector level? What connections can you draw among these stakeholders and resources to drive progress on this project? Tell each group to elect one person to share the key stakeholders, resources, and any unique connections or takeaways their group identified.

Discussion:

1. What strategies would you use to ensure stakeholders were both informed and engaged throughout the planning and implementation of this project?
2. What resources would you need in order to carry out this communication and engagement plan?
3. What external factors could impact the success of this project? Think about factors such as stakeholder opinions, resource availability, funding, etc. How would you address challenges from these factors?

Follow up with the FEMA Guidance Development Office

The Guidance Development Office (GDO) develops and distributes FEMA's Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) case studies. Our team would appreciate your feedback on these case studies and accompanying teaching notes. Please let us know how you have used this case study for a learning experience and your thoughts on what went well or could have been improved. To get in contact with our team, please email FEMA-RECOVERY-ICD-GDO@fema.dhs.gov. Thank you.