



Each year, we ask
high school
students to answer
the prompt...

**What can I do,
invent, or create
to better care for
the environment in
my backyard, or
to help the area's
preparedness for
a natural disaster?**

Created in Kenai, Alaska, by
Merrill Sikorski and
Leonor Araoz-Fraser.
Held annually since 1990.

Caring For My Backyard

It was a pleasure speaking with you earlier this week. Thank you for your interest in bringing Caring For My Backyard to your area. As promised, I'm following up with further information about what is involved.

Starting with the basics, Caring For My Backyard is an environment ideas contest, which rewards participating students and classrooms with cash awards. We do this for one simple reason: true change is generational, but it starts with one person and one idea.

Students start with the question, "What can I do, invent, or create to better care for the environment in my backyard, or to help improve the areas preparedness for a natural disaster?" Through dedicated class time and coaching, entrants research an issue and write a brief essay about their idea. Those essays are collected through an extensive process of judging, nearly 400 proposals are narrowed down to 12 finalists. After the finalists and teachers are notified of their standings, they begin preparing for an oral presentation. Students have several weeks to prepare for this presentation in front of a panel of 7 judges, an audience, and streamed live over the internet.

Caring For My Backyard was launched in 1990 as 'Caring For the Kenai,' created by Merrill Sikorski and Leonor Araoz-Fraser, initially sponsored by Unocal. During that first contest, one student's idea for a polyculture greenhouse went on to receive a \$78,000 grant from the AK Science and Technology Foundation and has been successful for 28 years and counting.

Since then, six winning projects have gone on to win the President's Environmental Youth Award, along with numerous other youth environmental awards and scholarships. Today, the original contest continues in Kenai, administered by the Challenger Learning Center of Alaska and sponsored in part by Andeavor. Each contest receives ongoing support from their own local funding resources.

In our experience, there are three essential ingredients for a contest to succeed:

1. A host organization that will administer the contest. This can be done by the Challenger Learning Center of Alaska, if no organization is available in your area
2. One or more funders who will support the costs of the contest, including providing funding to staff and support it on an ongoing basis. (The start-up costs of a contest are around \$77,000 and a contest's annual operating expenses are around \$75,000 - \$120,000, depending on local cost of living and incentive awards determined by the local contest)
3. An individual who is willing to champion the CFMB effort, either in a full-time paid position or as a volunteer

We will provide you with all the necessary training, materials, and support to launch and run a multi-generational contest. We are not a funding agency, but we will assist in your search for a sponsor.

During your first year, staff will visit your location for each key CFMB event to help plan and run each event.

Two CFMB staff members will fly to your location and provide 120 hours of in-person training for full-time local staff. You will also have 120 hours of remote support from CFMB staff, to be used as needed.

The annual licensing fee (included in the contest's annual operating expenses) is approximately 10% of your annual budget. This helps CFMB continue to develop best practices and assist fledgling contests with their first year.

I realize that you are just at the exploratory phase now. If you are interested in pursuing the concept and feel your circumstances and resources might provide a good fit, please let me know. I will certainly let you know if I learn of any potential funders who might be a fit.

Thank you again for your interest and warm regards.

- Students begin with an environmental issue they wish to address and develop a solution specific to that issue. Each entrant, or team, writes describing the problem (s)he is attempting to solve, what has been learned about this problem, and a tangible solution to the problem.
- Entries are narrowed down to 12 finalists who then present their ideas orally to a panel of community judges.
- All entrants receive a recognition award and all participating classrooms share in cash for materials or events.
- Finalists share in cash prizes or exchange trips.

A Model Educational Partnership

CFMB gets its message to a larger segment of the population than just students and teachers. The program's main message – *“We are all environmental decision makers”* – reaches parents and the community at large.

Parents learn about CFMB when students discuss and work on their projects at home. In addition, local media co-sponsors assist in getting the message out to the public. Industry, government, educators, regulators, and private citizens work together to promote both educational and environmental innovations.

Past Notable Projects



Bradyn Holly

In 2012, Soldotna High School student Bradyn Holly started investigating the way roads are sanded during winter, searching for a way to cut down on springtime air and water pollution. Bradyn writes...

"My project taught me to never give up when trying to find an answer to a question no matter how hard it is to find and how many people you have to ask because each person you talk to can teach you something no matter who they are."



Freya Chay

Renewable energy systems are exempt from property taxes in Alaska, thanks to 2010 contest winner Freya Chay.

In 2010, Freya was a freshman at Kenai Central High School with her idea for a property tax exemption for renewable energy systems. Freya brought her idea to local lawmakers as a Legislative amendment, which was signed into law by Alaskan Governor Sean Parnell just a few weeks after Freya won the contest.

- **1991** A polyculture greenhouse project went on to receive a \$78,000 grant from the AK Science and Technology Foundation.
- **1994** Serena Woods school curriculum project featured on ABC's "Good Morning America."
- **1996** First contest winner honored at the White House with the President's Environmental Youth Award.
- **1997** Winner Alden Ford produces 1,000 copies of his computer program called "The Kenai Peninsula's Amazing Water Maze."
- **1999** Three students build light-penetrating boardwalks along the Soldotna Creek Park, a salmon spawning tributary.
- **2005** Marit Hartvigson receives the President's Environmental Youth Award for a project to build platforms along Slikok Creek. She becomes the 4th contest winner to be honored with the PEYA.
- **2008** Winner Lincoln Wensley receives the PEYA for his video on preserving the Kenai Sand Dunes.
- **2009** Olivia Pfeifer trains a rescue dog to scare birds from airport runways, saving birds and planes.
- **2010** Gov. Sean Parnell signs into law a bill for alternate energy credits to homeowners, an amendment created by Freya Chay.
- **2011** Kelsie Leaf organized a crew to replant trees after a Walmart was built in Kenai.
- **2012** Courtney Stroh receives statewide and partners with 4-H and the Boys & Girls club to create a legacy youth group that met daily at the mouth of the Kenai River during the dip net fishery, cleaning the beach and educating fishers.

Find more at <http://caringformybackyard.com/>

Over 28 Years...

- We have taken six teams to the White House to receive the President's Environmental Youth Award (from three different Presidents), along with a variety of other national and state awards and scholarships.
- Annually, 65 volunteers donate 1,200 hours of their own time
- We've distributed more than \$200,000 to local classrooms
- More than 8,400 Kenai Peninsula students have been impacted

"I'd have to say that the biggest impact has been giving my students an opportunity for authentic learning that goes beyond the classroom. Kids have been able to make connections between what we teach from the curriculum and how it applies to their community. CFMB has also given kids an opportunity to have a real impact on their own community."

Kristin Davis – High School Science Teacher

Prior to this competition my son Robert didn't think going to college would work for him. He struggles with Dyslexia and prior to this is undermined his self-confidence. As his mother I can't thank you enough. This changed his world. He's about to graduate with a 3.33 GPA and has a college plan and a great career path in front of him.

Lara McGinnis – Mother



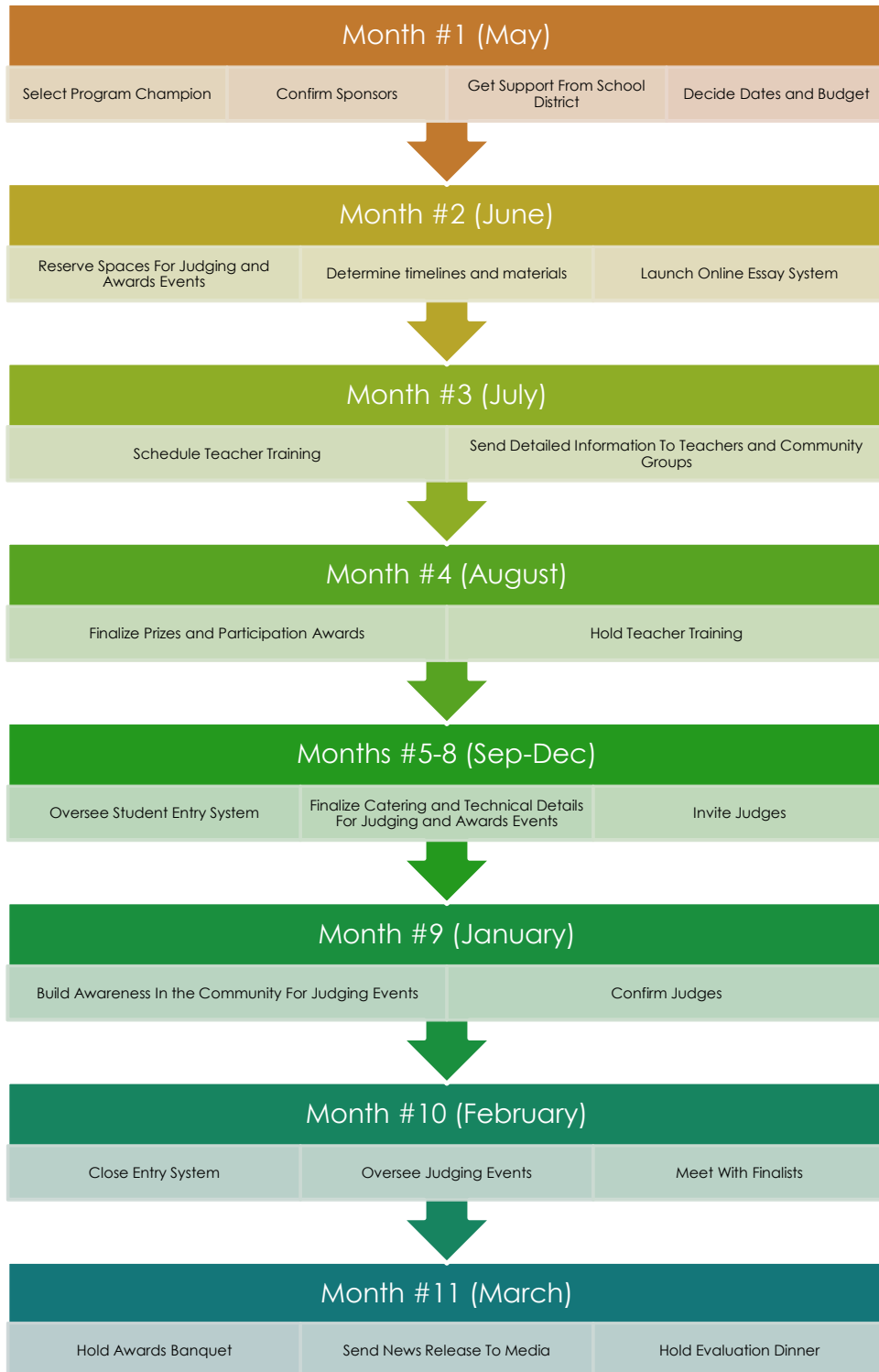
Worldwide Impact

- CFMB Outreach Director Katie Quinn was hired in September 2017 to begin expanding the contest to new communities across the world
- Katie is currently speaking with sponsors and community organizations about launching contests in: Prince of Wales island, Washington state, Idaho, Hawaii, New York state, and Australia
- CFMB students are now working in every level of government and business in Alaska and across the world
- 2009 winner Olivia Pfeifer is now a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama. She writes that this contest, *“was the first time I really felt the environmental spark so to speak. As a high schooler it gave me the opportunity to learn about fundraising, how local governments work, and how to overcome obstacles. I think 100% that my participation in the project is the most valuable thing I was able to do in my high school career.”*

We receive countless similar testimonials



Sample Timeline



Finalist and Classroom Prizes

CFMB was started in the early 1990's as a way to support local education and inspire students to take their creativity and problem-solving abilities beyond the classroom and into the professional world.

Each of the top 12 finalists receive a 'motivational' cash prize. Each classroom in which the contest is assigned as a class project shares in a separate cash award, to used for materials or excursions.

All entrants receive a small participation 'premium' (recently, we've given entrants a rechargeable battery pack for their mobile phones or a jumper)

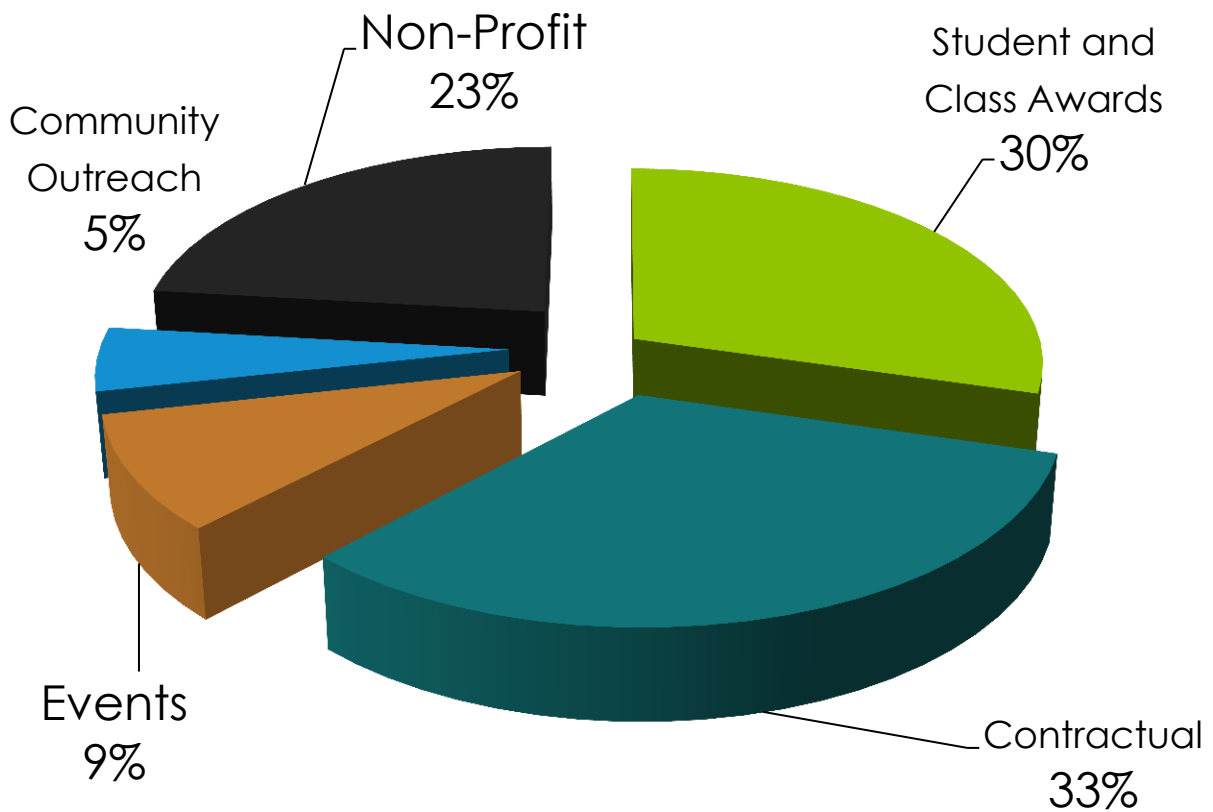
In the future, we are hoping to hold student exchanges between participating contest areas, instead of direct cash prizes. These exchanges would be designed to give students a hands-on tour of the environment in locations which may include:

- Kenai, Alaska, USA
- Prince of Wales Island, Alaska, USA
- Seattle, Washington, USA
- Nez Pearce Indian Reservation, Idaho, USA
- Tioga County, New York, USA
- Tumut, NSW, AUSTRALIA

This idea may several years to establish, depending on the willingness of each district and in-kind donors, but we would love to see all our students inspired by the grassroots changes being made across the hemispheres.

We especially want to bring groups and contest administrators to Alaska, to see firsthand the deep impact the contest has had on all dimensions of the Kenai community.

Sample Budget



Training Provided

- CFMB Outreach Director Katie Quinn will walk you through the process of selecting a team and explaining the vision to your community
- Katie will help oversee the first year of the contest, to make sure deadlines are met and events are planned, traveling to your community to help run the teacher training, judging events, and awards banquet
- Katie will help watch the student submission system to ensure it works smoothly
- CFMB will provide a complete project manual and all materials and templates (emails, invitations, awards, judging scoresheets, etc)
- Remote support will be available at any time via phone or email

We do ask that your sponsors cover the cost of Katie's time and travel expenses.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

- We LOVE this program. We love seeing teenagers excited and engaged, with possibilities at their fingertips becoming reality. It changes lives.
- We want to see this community/environmental 'spark' catch on and motivate the next generation to 'care' for their world.
- This multi-year approach preserves small towns by connecting students with the professional community. This gives them a reason to stay in the region (or return) and be involved in making a difference.

Former Kenai School Board President

December 11, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

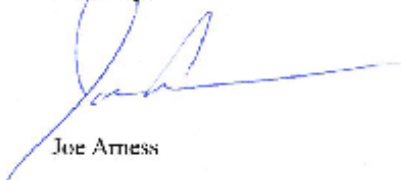
Caring For the Kenai is the kind of program which comes around once in a career. Merrill Sikorski and Leonor-Araoz Fraser have left a legacy on the Kenai Peninsula, bringing the support of private industry to public schools, without influencing how teachers convey basic environmental principles. I've seen this innovative curriculum achieve things in STEM education and language arts that are unparalleled.

I was President of the Kenai Peninsula School Board for 13 years and a Board Member for another seven years, and the CFK presentations were always a highlight of the year. Students from every high school in our district had the opportunity to create solutions and be rewarded for their efforts. The contest boosted our reputation for educational excellence and provided additional funding for teachers to use as they best saw fit.

CFK brings real life experiences into the classroom and provides a way for students to actually apply what they're learning in textbooks. The contest has been adopted as part of our school district's recognized curriculum.

I'm proud to see this simple idea which was born on the Kenai Peninsula now reaching a national audience. I would encourage any school district to adopt this program without delay.

Sincerely,



Joe Arness

Alaska State Legislature

State Capitol, Room 334
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
Phone: 907-465-3778
Toll Free: 800-469-3779



145 Main St., Lower
Suite 223
Kenai, Alaska 99811
Phone: 907-484-7323

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CHENAULT HOUSE DISTRICT 29

December 26, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

As Speaker of the Alaska State House for eight years and the elected State House Representative for District 29 for more than 16 years, I am very pleased to recommend the Caring For My Backyard contest.

Since its inception in 1990 as 'Caring For the Kenai', this contest has been inspiring students across the Kenai Peninsula to create solutions and help strengthen our community. Numerous students have received state and national recognition for their projects and virtually every element of the environment has been considered and improved in some way. Caring For the Kenai has remained dedicated to encouraging young people and protecting the environment while partnering with responsible industry partners.

As community leaders, we benefit from the creativity of our young people and their willingness to test ideas that haven't been tried before. We also enjoy the support of industry and the open relationship fostered through these events.

Caring For the Kenai is about finding solutions, not just identifying problems and demanding attention. Any community would be fortunate to have this contest running in their schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Chenault".

Representative Mike Chenault
House District 29

STATE CAPITOL
PO Box 1, 9000
Juneau, AK 99811-5001
207-463-3500
fax: 207-463-3512



Governor Bill Walker
STATE OF ALASKA

550 West Bow Tie Avenue, Suite 1700
Anchorage, AK 99503
507-269-7453
fax: 207-269-7461
www.GovAlaska.Gov
Governor@Alaska.Gov

December 7, 2017

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to express my strong support for Caring for the Kenai (CFK), an innovative youth education program in Alaska.

In 1990, the community of the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska created a brilliant partnership that is a strong model for 21st century learning. The concept of the CFK program represents a collaborative effort toward environmental awareness where individuals, industry leaders, educators, government officials, and students work together for common goals.

This program and its participants have received numerous national awards and have had real, positive impacts to Alaska. For example, alternative energy incentive legislation signed into law in 2010 (SB 220) included an amendment introduced by a high school freshman who was a CFK environmental awareness and disaster preparedness competition winner. Another program participant designed an app to help fishermen distinguish protected species, and another instituted an annual race fundraiser that has raised over \$60,000 for habitat restoration since 2012. The significance of using student ideas to positively impact our environment is just one of the many benefits of the CFK program.

I commend the work of CFK and program participants for more than 25 years. This year CFK will again distribute more than \$25,000 to Kenai Peninsula students and their schools as they find unique ways to answer the question: "What can I do, invent, or create to better care for the environment on the Kenai Peninsula, or to help improve the area's preparedness for a natural disaster?"

CFK has now developed into a national program called Caring for My Backyard, which is available in your state. I encourage you to take a close look at what this program can do for your community.

Sincerely,


Bill Walker
Governor

Alaska's Congressman

DON YOUNG
CONGRESSMAN FOR ALL ALASKA
WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2214 FAYETTE, SUITE 1405
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
202-225-6700



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
December 11, 2017

COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INDIAN, INSULAR, AND
ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
REPUBLICAN
POLICY COMMITTEE

To whom it may concern:

It is truly an honor and a privilege to provide a letter of recommendation for Caring for my Backyard, an innovative youth education program in Alaska.

Twenty-one years ago, an entire community located on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska created a unique partnership that is a model for 21st century learning. The origins of Caring for my Backyard are rooted in the formerly known and locally based Caring for the Kenai (CFK). The concept of the CFK program represented a collaborative effort towards environmental awareness where individuals, industry leaders, educators, government officials, and students work together toward common environmental goals.

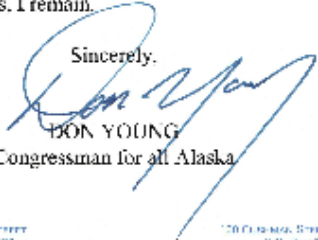
As the sole Representative of Alaska to the United States House of Representatives, I am challenged daily to fund a massive amount of projects and newly formed ideas. Most of the time, I find that programs are "invented" in order to seek some sort of grant funded or molded to fit a national grant program for the local level. That model never works.

I firmly believe that when it comes to the environment, listening and learning from people most affected by environmental changes at the local, not national, levels best serves the public. You will find nowhere on the planet are environmental concerns more pronounced than Alaska. Moreover, the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska stands as one of the most affected areas. Thus, the program has been a great success because of our local people and their situation. The reason I can fully support Caring for our Backyard is the program's innovative nature in that it is rooted at the local level focusing on a broad cross-section of youth, community leaders and industry. The program is not driven by a top heavy national organization or a specific federal grant.

This innovative program has received numerous national awards too lengthy to list here. Additionally, the power of using student ideas to positively impact our environment is just one of the many benefits of the Caring for the Backyard program. Caring for our Backyard has now developed into a national program that is available in your state. I would encourage you to take a close look at what this program can do for your community and assure that you will not be disappointed.

With warmest regards and best wishes, I remain,

Sincerely,


DON YOUNG
Congressman for all Alaska

Visit Our Website:
<http://don.young.house.gov>

4211 E. Steiner
Suite 303
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
207-271-2976

100 Commercial Street, Suite 207
P.O. Box 20730
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707
907-455-0470

Call Toll Free:
1-800-890-1975

How Do We Start?

- Let's talk. Ask me any questions about how the contest is run or how we could make changes to suit your community.
- Key players we'll need to bring on board:
 - ✍ A signature sponsor
 - ✍ A Program Champion to handle on-the-ground communication and organization (The Champion should be someone who is passionate about the environment and young people)
 - ✍ School district administrators and teachers
- Decide how the contest will be administered. Funds are typically handled through a 501(c)3 non-profit. You will need someone to receive funds and pay bills. I can also help with finding a non-profit if you don't have one available.

Don't hesitate to email me at any time. I'd love to set up a phone conversation at your convenience.

Contact:

Katie Quinn

CFMB Outreach Director

(907)953-6541

katie.quinn@akchallenger.org