THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: STRENGTHENING LOCAL VOICES IN ARCTIC GOVERNANCE

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Arctic Mayors' Forum

NAPA

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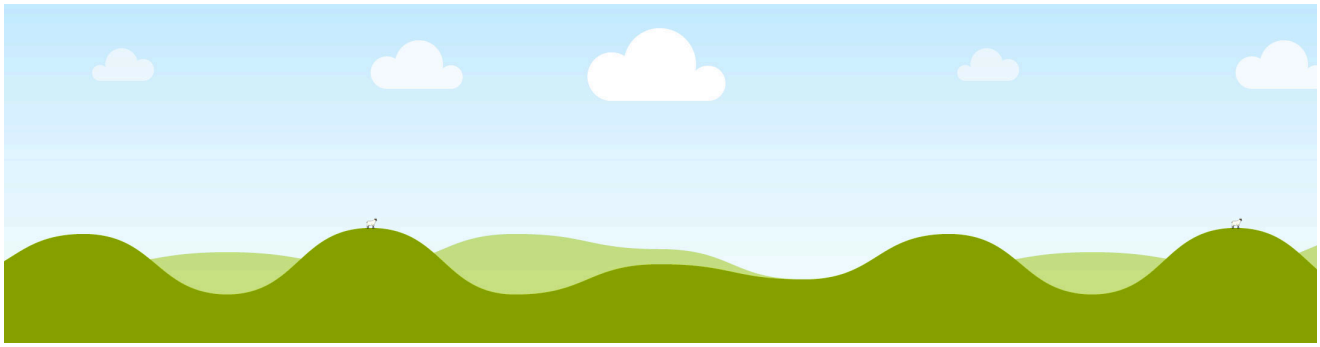
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02 OVERVIEW

High-level decisionmakers often determine Arctic policy far away from impacted populations. This report looks at how the Arctic Mayors' Forum (AMF) can improve its relationship with one such group of high-level decisionmakers, the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). It answers the primary research question: How should AMF engage NCM to ensure consideration of local issues in NCM policymaking?"

The report addresses this research question by asking and answering four sub-questions[1]. Key findings are as follows:



Question 1

Who are the key Nordic Council of Ministers stakeholders and how are they best engaged?

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a vast organization, which merits targeted intervention with seven key stakeholders. These stakeholders are worth engaging because they have strong influence within NCM or a direct connection to Arctic issues.

Question 2

How closely aligned are Nordic Council of Ministers priorities and Arctic Mayors' Forum priorities?

Nordic Council of Ministers and Arctic Mayors' Forum priorities are largely aligned. Workarounds exist for areas with less alignment.

Question 3

Who are the key Nordic Council of Ministers stakeholders and how are they best engaged?

The Nordic Council of Ministers heavily engages the local level on agenda implementation, but less-commonly works with Arctic Peoples on agenda co-creation. AMF can work towards agenda co-creation by institutionalizing involvement with NCM.

Question 4

What strategic value does the Arctic Mayors' Forum add to the Nordic Council of Ministers, and vice versa?

An improved relationship enhances both sides' credibility and effectiveness. Through collaboration, AMF can garner financial support and further national policies that promote sustainable, livable cities.

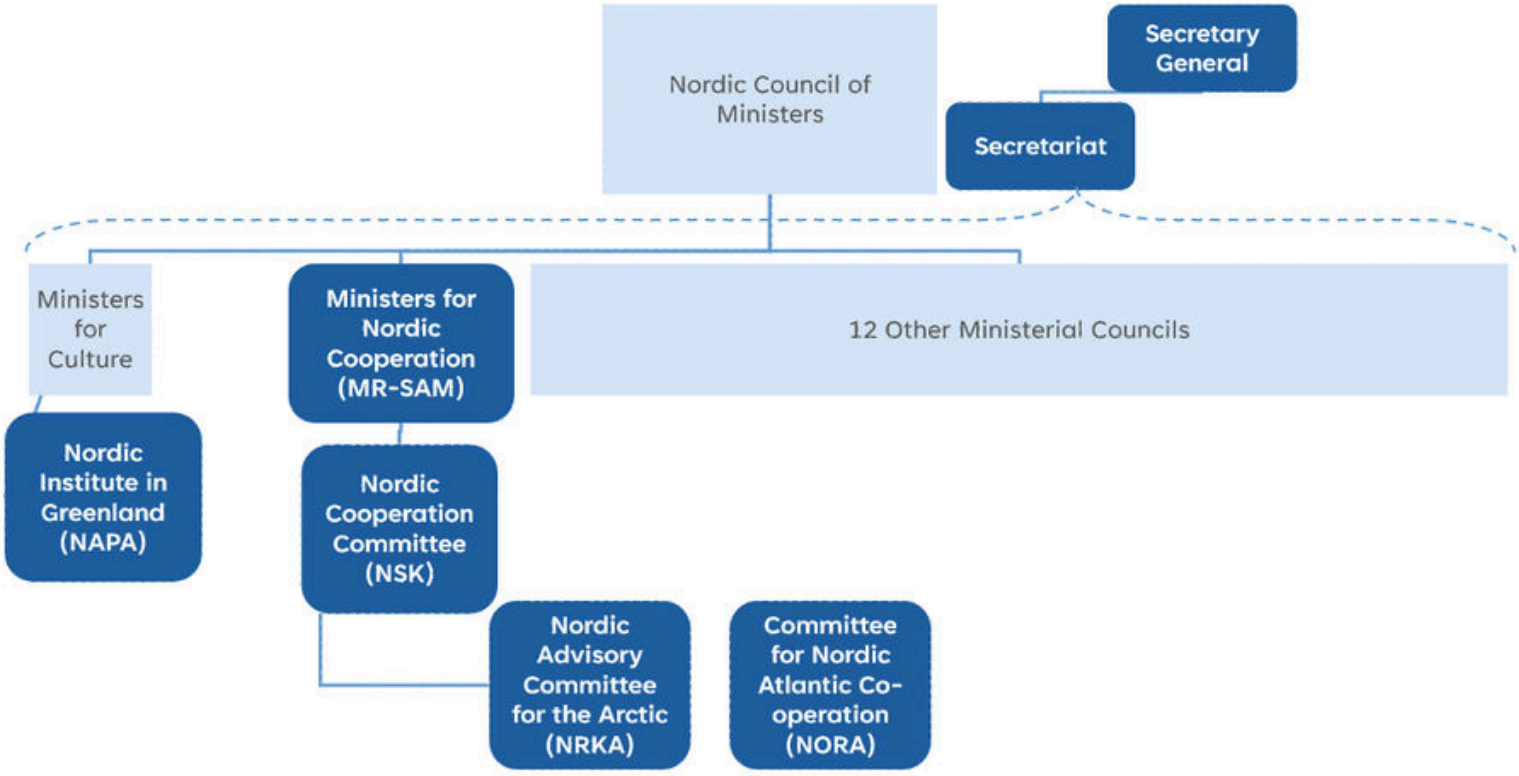
[1] Methodology: Desk research and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders embedded in the Arctic Mayors' Forum and Nordic Council of Ministers ecosystem informed this report.

03 QUESTION ONE

Who are the key Nordic Council of Ministers stakeholders and how are they best engaged?

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a vast organization, which merits targeted intervention with seven key stakeholders. The following organizational chart offers a high-level understanding of NCM's organization and lists the stakeholders that AMF would benefit from forming a relationship with. The organs identified with darker colors are particularly important for AMF because they have strong influence or a direct connection to Arctic issues. The identified stakeholders vary, from top officials who could offer high-level political buy-in to working-level bureaucrats who perform day-to-day operations.

AMF will want to engage these organs mindfully, keeping national government representatives appraised of its activities.



Simplified Organizational Chart for Nordic Council of Ministers. Examples of the "12 other ministerial councils" include the Ministers for Labor, Sustainable Growth, Gender Equality, and Energy.

04 QUESTION TWO

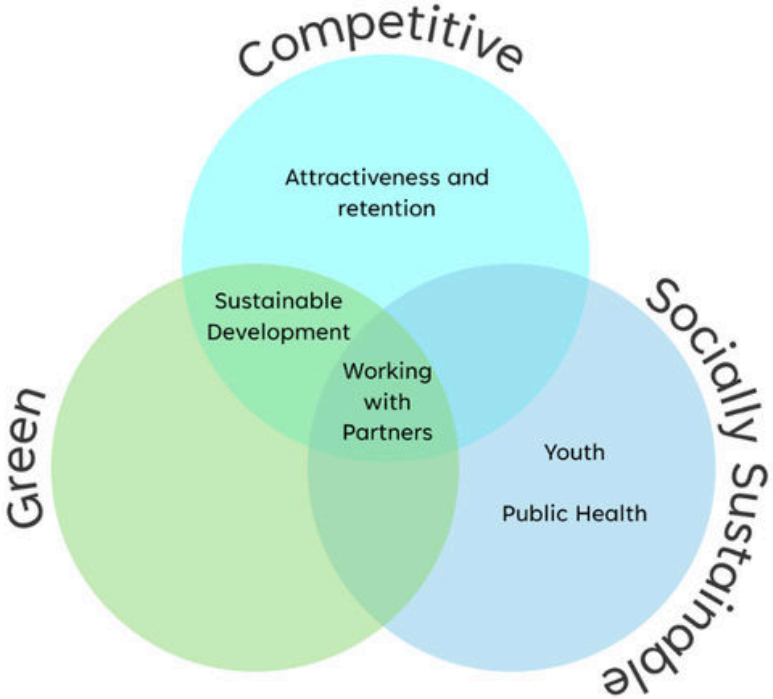
How closely aligned are Nordic Council of Ministers priorities and Arctic Mayors' Forum priorities?

Nordic Council of Ministers and Arctic Mayors' Forum priorities are largely aligned. NCM has an overarching agenda called Vision 2030 that all part of its organization must work towards, and many other sub-agendas that different parts of the organization generate to align with the overall vision. The Vision 2030 Agenda looks to foster[i]:

- • A **green** Nordic region that that works towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable circular and bio-based economy.
- ·A competitive Nordic region promotes green growth via knowledge, innovation, mobility and digital integration.
- ·A **socially sustainable** Nordic region that values inclusivity, interconnection, shared values, and strengthened cultural exchange and welfare.

NCM also has an Arctic Agenda whose primary goals—social, economic, climate and environmental resilience—closely align with AMF's.

Vision 2030 priorities align well with AMF's goals of public health and mental wellbeing, sustainable development, attractiveness and retention, youth, and partnerships



While these priorities align, AMF will want to remain mindful that NCM focuses on the Nordics. AMF will want to take steps to ensure that Canadian and American members of AMF can benefit from AMF's partnership with NCM.

05 QUESTION THREE

How are local issues currently incorporated into the Nordic Council of Ministers' agenda?

The Nordic Council of Ministers heavily engages the local level on agenda implementation, but less-commonly works with Arctic Peoples on agenda co-creation.



AMF's mission to "give local governments a voice in the development of the Arctic" suggests that both implementation and agenda co-creation are important to work towards.

- **Agenda Implementation:**
  - One of NCM's primary functions is to support local activities that align with its agenda. It performs much of this work through dispersion of funding to organizations on the ground. For example, the city of Tromsø is working with AMF as part of its designation of European Youth Capital for 2026.[2] The cities of Oulu, Finland and Lulea, Sweden, together with several other municipalities within the Bothnian Arc cross-border region, work as a border committee with funding from NCM.[34]
- **Agenda Co-Creation:**
  - The Nordic Council of Ministers mostly listens to national actors when creating its agenda. For example, civil servants for national governments are the primary architects of NCM's Arctic priorities. Local inclusion for agenda co-creation is not common practice, but NCM members might be open to more local consultation.[5]
  - AMF members strongly desire deeper local engagement on agenda co-creation. Members espoused the benefits of local engagement for democracy, quality of life, government responsiveness, and transparency.

> "Especially up in the North…cities are your gate to the whole ecosystem of stakeholders and doers. So you can't do much here unless the main city is engaged in the activities."
> -Ari Alatossava, Mayor of Oulu, Finland

[2] Gunnar Wilhelmsen, Interview with the Mayor of Tromso, Norway, Zoom, December 20, 2024.
[3] Anne Rännäli-Kontturi and Ari Alatossava, Interview with the Mayor and International Affairs Manager of Oulu, Finland, Zoom, December 19, 2024.
[4] Daniel Smirat, Interview with the Chairman of the Luleå, Sweden Municipal Council, Zoom, December 20, 2024.
[5] Former Nordic Council of Ministers official, Interview about the Nordic Council of Ministers, Zoom, March 28, 2025.

05 QUESTION FOUR

What strategic value does the Arctic Mayors' Forum add to the Nordic Council of Ministers, and vice versa?

An improved relationship enhances both sides' credibility and effectiveness. Local consultation gives a more realistic picture of communities' needs and strengths, which in turn increases the efficacy of international agendas. NCM can offer financial support to support AMF, influence national-level policies that greatly impact cities, and reflect local voices to higher levels of government.

The following chart explores some of the ways that AMF adds value with respect to NCM's Agenda 2030:

Agenda 2030 Priority	Why AMF is an Asset	Example
A Green Nordic Region	Many of the critical minerals crucial to the greening of the Nordic region are in the Arctic in AMF communities.	In Lulea, Sweden, construction has commenced for a phosphorus and rare earth mineral refinement facility, the first of its kind in Europe.[6]
A Competitive Nordic Region	Cities and municipalities are actively working to promote job growth in the high north. They are most acutely aware of how trends in mobility can promote or stunt economic competitiveness.	In 2023, two-thirds of the people who moved to Oulu, Finland were immigrants.[7] Integrating them into the job market requires understanding local needs.
A Socially Sustainable Nordic Region	Social sustainability starts with social trust. Trust is typically highest among citizens and their local officials. This is particularly true in Arctic settings, where citizens feel their remoteness from southern capitals.[8]	Tromsø, Norway is the European Youth Capital for 2026 and recently hosted the Arctic Council's inaugural Arctic Youth Conference, demonstrating its attentiveness to developing trust from a young age.[9]

[6] "LKAB Constructs Facility for Critical Minerals - the First of Its Kind in Europe," LKAB, accessed February 8, 2025, https://lkab.com/en/press/lkab-constructs-facility-for-critical-minerals-the-first-of-its-kind-in-europe/.

[7] Aleksi Teivainen, "Finnish Municipalities Scrambling to Take Charge of Integration Services," Helsinki Times, September 10, 2024, sec. Domestic, https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/25593-finnish-municipalities-scrambling-to-take-charge-of-integration-services.html.

[8] Jean-Sébastien F. Arrighi et al., "The Scale of Trust: Local, Regional, National and European Politics in Perspective" (Le Groupe d'études géopolitiques, July 2022), https://geopolitique.eu/en/2022/07/13/the-scale-of-trust-local-regional-national-and-european-politics-in-perspective/.

[9] "True North – Tromsø 2026," accessed February 8, 2025, https://www.tromsoeyc2026.no/.

05 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, EXPLANATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION

The answers to the four sub-questions above point to the following recommendations to ensure consideration of local issues in NCM policymaking.

AMF's time and resources are not limitless, and AMF will naturally want to prioritize some recommendations over others. The recommendations are therefore split between lower and higher-effort activities.

	Recommendation	Explanation	Implementation
Lower Effort	**Pursue at least yearly check-ins with Secretary General, MR-SAM president**	These officials' buy-in is necessary if AMF wants to ask for a larger agenda-setting role	Engage Finnish Minister for Nordic Cooperation Anders Adlercreutz, and NCM Secretary General Karen Ellemann
Lower Effort	**Become a member of the Nordic Civil Society Network**	"Nordic Civ" regularly consults with NCM, so membership would give AMF increased agenda-setting power	Contact info@norden.se to express interest, and demonstrate alignment with Nordic Civ's sustainability and integration priorities
Lower Effort	**Show how AMF's non-Nordic members help realize Vision 2030 integration goals**	Canada and the US are important to NCM's "neighbors to the West" program despite being outside of the Nordics	Offer AMF's Canadian and US member cities as sites for cultural exchange
Higher Effort	**Chart working-level relationships with relevant Secretariats**	NRKA, NAPA, and NORA Secretariats are most directly involved with issues that AMF is concerned with, and help direct funding	Schedule regular check-ins, particularly with Anne-Katrine Brandt Olsen (NRKA), Pipaluk Lykke (NAPA), and Halla Nolsøe Poulsen (NORA)
Higher Effort	**Seek additional funding from NCM**	One example: NAPA and NORA can both fund projects for up to 1.5 million DKK over a three-year period	Apply to open calls and engage at year-end about leftover budgets
Higher Effort	**Seek to inform NCM's next Arctic Agenda**	NCM does not have a history of consistently including local actors when drafting its Arctic agenda	Have AMF members contact their national NRKA representatives in 2027 about the 2028 Arctic agenda
Higher Effort	**Engage NCM to help it implement its current Arctic Agenda**	NCM relies on local actors for agenda implementation	Share the ways AMF is already working towards NCM's 2025-2027 Arctic agenda and engage on a new project for 2026