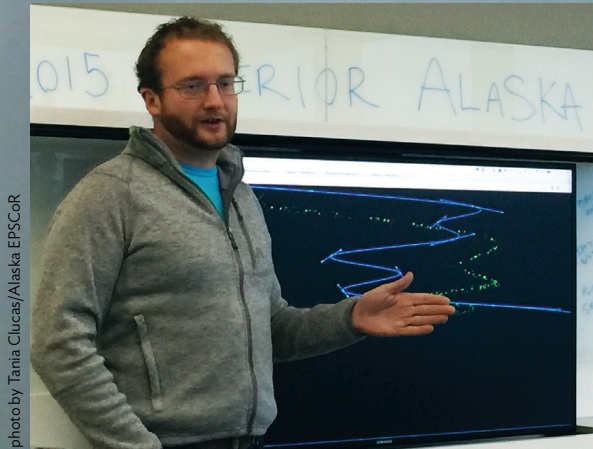# EPSCoR supports Interior Alaska Hackathon

In October 2015, Alaska EPSCoR helped some Fairbanks programmers try to catch the aurora in a bottle.

The "Aurora Design Visualization," which would create large-scale computer imagery of an artificial aurora based on scientific data, was one of three programs to emerge from the 2015 Interior Alaska Hackathon, which brought together volunteer coders to build software and applications to fill local needs.

"It's part of our workforce development, working on the EPSCoR mission for capacity-building," said EPSCoR Education, Outreach and Diversity Manager Tania Clucas, lead organizer of the event. "To make sure we're building Alaska's STEM capacity, not just in the public sector, but in the private sector as well."

photo by Tania Clucas/Alaska EPSCoR

UAA student Matt Dupre leads discussion at the Hackathon.

About 15 people showed up for the Hackathon, ensconcing themselves in UAF classroom space for a weekend as they tackled three projects: the aurora visualization; an application that enables people to report power outages and other utility failures on a Google Maps interface; and a program to display Landsat imagery of the same location over time across the seven screens of UAF's Decision Theater North. The utility app was judged the most promising of the lot, and its programmers received $500 and free entry into both the UAF School of Management's Arctic Innovation Competition and the Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation's 2015 Fairbanks Startup Weekend. It went on to win the latter competition.

"It's a much more efficient and accurate way to notify your utility about what's going on, rather than having to make a phone call on a landline," noted Clucas a week after the event. "Given that Fairbanks just had a snowstorm that pretty much shut down all of our electrical grid, it seems kind of prescient."

EPSCoR also co-sponsored an "Inventor's Forum" at UAF in June as well as the Fairbanks Startup Weekend. In addition, EPSCoR provides funds to the Alaska Technology Research and Development Center (Alaska TREND) at UAA, which awards small grants to Alaskan startup businesses to help them apply for larger federal funding. In 2015 TREND awarded seven grants totaling $35,000.