

## **Influencing Urban Planning & Built Environments**

“Built environment” refers to the constructed surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighborhoods and cities. The term can also be applied to supporting infrastructure, such as water supply and energy networks. Decisions about how these environments should be developed are often driven by political considerations, short-term opportunism or other factors that are disconnected from the needs and preferences of the families that are most affected by them. Vulnerable families in particular tend to get the least benefit from these approaches and often end up bearing a disproportionate share of the burden that a lack of planning foresight imposes on our cities and towns. Because these families are frequently disengaged from civic participation and processes, their voices are rarely heard or solicited in the decision-making processes.

Beyond the basic function of housing, well-conceived built environments provide a key platform for many, or most, functions of civic life. These functions include economic development, public health and higher levels of community and civic engagement, among others. The Foundation has made meaningful investments in the development of downtown Albuquerque and continues to support the development of built environments across the state that seek to take advantage of the role these environments can play to move New Mexican families toward a more prosperous and healthy future.

The Foundation continues to view the well-conceived development of built environments as critical, supporting strategies that encourage energy efficiency, build civic engagement and support economic development. The following specific leverage points have been identified to help focus and drive our grant making within this priority area:

### **Key Leverage Points**

**Injecting community voices into urban development.** Families are profoundly impacted by decisions made by government agencies, planning commissions and other entities, especially regarding the methods in which parks, roads, buildings, housing developments and other structures are planned and prioritized. The Foundation supports efforts that encourage the concept that community voice is of great relevance in these decision-making processes, driving higher levels of civic engagement and participation among all New Mexican families.

**Driving resource efficiency in built environments.** In a state often challenged by scarce resources, especially water, innovative approaches to planning, design and construction of buildings and communities that maximize efficiency in use of those resources should

be prioritized. Organizations and programs that seek to drive these efficiencies as “best practices” in both rural and urban contexts are prioritized by the Foundation.

**Innovative strategies for affordable housing.** Safe, stable and appropriate housing is one of the key contributors to positive outcomes for families seeking to improve or maintain their economic situation. With high numbers of low-income families in New Mexico, overcoming various hurdles and increasing the availability of such housing remains an ongoing challenge around the state. While the Foundation is unable to directly fund the construction of housing developments, it does support efforts to initiate and drive such projects, especially those that integrate services or other programmatic elements that will help vulnerable families succeed or that include mixed-income approaches.