



Influencing Planning of Built Environments

“Built environment” refers to the constructed surroundings that provide the setting for community and individual activity, ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to cities, neighborhoods, towns, villages and tribal communities. 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. Low and middle income 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 cities and towns. Because these families are frequently unable to access civic participation processes, their voices are rarely heard or solicited in decision-making.

Well-conceived built environments provide a key platform for many functions of family and civic life and are fundamentally connected to many factors that contribute to community health. These functions include economic development and higher levels of community and civic engagement, among others. The Foundation supports 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 views well-conceived, community-informed development of built environments as critical and supports strategies that encourage energy efficiency, build civic engagement and promote equitable economic development with respect for the history of places and the people who live in them. Strategies that mitigate the displacement of existing communities and negative impacts on the historical and cultural character of neighborhoods, as well as increase access to opportunities beneficial to local communities, are examples of equitable development. Such strategies are place-based and informed by the communities impacted.

Influencing Planning of Built Environments Key Leverage Points

Bringing community voices into urban development – Families are profoundly impacted by decisions made by government agencies, planning commissions and other entities, especially regarding the ways in which parks, roads, buildings, housing developments and other structures are planned and prioritized. The Foundation supports efforts that reinforce community voice as critical to decision-making processes, driving higher levels of civic engagement and participation among all New Mexican families.

Access to affordable, efficient renewable energy and health equity in built environments – Innovative approaches to planning, design and construction of buildings and places that create equitable infrastructure and healthy environments that contribute to environmental and cultural vitality are prioritized by the Foundation in both rural and urban communities.

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