



Strategies for Rural Development

New Mexico is the fifth largest state in the nation in terms of land area and, somewhat conversely, it is the 36th most populous state. This means that New Mexico is largely rural, with 26 out of 33 counties considered “frontier counties” (six or fewer people per square mile).

While a majority of the population in the state lives in four urban areas (Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Rio Rancho and Santa Fe), New Mexico maintains a significant population base that honors its rural roots. Among many New Mexico communities, a rural way of life supports a fundamental cultural connection with the landscape of the state and to the values that many families honor and maintain. In addition, many in our metropolitan areas are connected to rural traditions through familial and other connections.

Strategies and approaches that work in the state’s urban areas often fail in other parts of New Mexico because of the geographic challenges implicit with rural landscapes and, also, because of differences that exist between urban and rural communities. Nonetheless, the cultural, familial and social connections that also exist across New Mexico can provide opportunities to creatively connect with resources, programs and initiatives that have already developed support for related work being done in urban areas.

Strategies for Rural Development Leverage Points

Economic development – High levels of poverty are often pervasive across New Mexico’s rural areas, and the trend is becoming increasingly pronounced with the consolidation as well as decline of land-based activities, including agriculture, wood gathering and logging, and mineral extraction. Initiatives that seek to support sustainable and regenerative land-based practices, including agricultural enterprises that support the creation of food-based businesses, are of interest to the Foundation, as are efforts that support equitable economic transition and diversification strategies for regions affected by New Mexico’s transition to renewable energy.

The Foundation also supports the development of business models that provide cultural benefits, including those based in the arts. Additionally, innovative applications of technology (e.g., teleconferencing or new uses of

broadband connectivity) that support new business development or enhance operation of existing enterprises are also supported by the Foundation.

Educational advancement – While equitable access to engaging and culturally relevant education is a significant challenge statewide, the challenges that rural areas face can be unique given the nature of these landscapes. For example, rural schools and libraries often lack needed resources, yet also frequently and substantially serve broader roles in the community as hubs for additional services and activities that contribute to deepening the educational experience, as well as to social cohesion and community wellbeing. Strategies that seek to leverage and support the position of these and other community institutions in this broader role are priorities for the Foundation, as are innovative approaches that integrate

“learning by doing” and comprehensive support for students.

The Foundation also prioritizes efforts to leverage schools and other institutions to enable rural residents to enhance their workforce skills in ways that expand the range of economic opportunities open to them in their home communities.

Built environment – Rural communities can be disproportionately impacted by main streets and town centers that have become degraded or populated by decaying buildings or facades. These conditions often discourage a sense of community cohesiveness and vitality. While the Foundation cannot support major capital projects, it does support community-informed and supported initiatives and programs that seek to upgrade rural built environments, increase energy efficiency, and generally revitalize the community.