ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC & LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO



CECE | INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AWARDS PROGRAM

2024 CASE STUDY

IEP CATEGORY - INNOVATION

The University of New Mexico

Bolstering Entrepreneurs in New Mexico's Indigenous Communities

STARTING WITH A PITCH



The University of New Mexico partnering with Hesperus and Syracuse University D'Aniello Institute for Veterans & Military Families to bring an Entrepreneurship Bootcamp to Native American Veterans (EBV-NAV) in New Mexico

In July 2022, at the annual American Indian Business Enterprise Conference in Albuquerque, NM, Akilah Martinez, artist, and XR technologist, pitched her business idea to use XR technology to help preserve her native Diné language and culture for the next generation. The New Mexico Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program (NMTEEP) Manager, Cecilia Becenti, was in the crowd at the conference and heard Akilah's pitch. Over the course of the next year, Cecilia followed Akilah's journey, eventually having her as a guest on UNM Rainforest Innovations' Indigenous Entrepreneur's Podcast and nominating Akilah for the New Mexico Technology Council's Women in Tech Awards as an Emerging Leader in Tech. Akilah was selected as an award recipient for 2024 and is now connected to the New Mexico Technology Council's greater network of leading technologists. This first encounter at the American Indian Business Enterprise Conference and the model and daily efforts of the New Mexico Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program to connect Indigenous entrepreneurs to resources and opportunities led to the nomination and Akilah and the opportunity for a young Diné woman to be acknowledged as an Emerging Leader in Tech.

This is only one of many examples of how the NMTEEP is catalyzing connections between New Mexico's academic, innovation, and Indigenous populations that may have otherwise not been made.

2022 - TODAY, NEW MEXICO TRIBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (NMTEEP) OUTCOMES

Funded by a U.S. Economic Development Administration grant, NMTEEP is a grassroots effort and collaboration among UNM and Indigenous Entrepreneurs throughout the state of New Mexico.

Spearheaded by UNM Rainforest Innovation, the NMTEEP has enlisted a team of five tribal liaisons who serve as "boots on the ground," informants, advocates, and key connectors for various tribal communities throughout the state of New Mexico. The tribal liaisons serve as abridge, engaging in discovery sessions to identify key needs and barriers that exist in their communities and connect entrepreneurs to existing programs and resource providers throughout the state's ecosystem. The liaisons also brainstorm solutions regarding existing gaps to inform future programming. This is a unique and effective model that catalyzes connections between different worlds, relays important information, tells the story of "the Indigenous Entrepreneur," informs resource providers about what these entrepreneurs truly need, and opens doors to opportunities that may have otherwise been left closed or untapped.

By the Numbers

Since the program started in May 2022, NMTEEP has been able to interact with 409 unique individuals throughout the state of New Mexico, conducted 123 interviews with unique individuals, and engaged in 107 mentoring sessions with 57 unique Indigenous entrepreneurs. The program reach spans across the state, with a focus on coal impacted communities in the Northwestern region of New Mexico. From the interviews and mentoring sessions, 400+ referrals have been made to various organizations, programs, and funding sources in the New Mexico entrepreneurial ecosystem. These metrics are reported by the tribal liaisons to the Project Manager monthly via monthly time logs, story sheets, weekly meetings, and intake forms. The Project Manager stores and interprets the data numerically as well as keeps track of highlight stories and pipeline metrics reporting quarterly success stories to the UNMRI Board of Directors and posting press releases to the UNMRI website. The Project Manager also hosts weekly podcast episodes interviewing various Indigenous entrepreneurs and resource providers to further connect and engage New Mexico's entrepreneurial ecosystem with its Indigenous entrepreneurial community.

Driving Inclusivity

UNMRI has become well established and connected in the New Mexico entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, many Indigenous-led organizations and key leaders have yet to be properly integrated into this ecosystem. NMTEEP has helped to bridge this gap, creating a more diverse and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem where Indigenous entrepreneurs and leaders feel welcome. These efforts were clearly seen at the annual UNM Business and Economic Summit in January 2024 where the room was the most diverse that it has ever been at such an event with tribal liaisons and other

Indigenous leaders serving as presenters and panelists, increasing not only the diversity of attendees, but also of thoughts, experiences, and voices in the room.

Expansion of Programming

UNM Rainforest Innovations has also acquired two new tenants to the Lobo Rainforest Building, Roanhorse Consulting, and Raven Indigenous Capital Partners, who are key players when it comes to Indigenous entrepreneurship and wealth building. Adding these two organizations to the Lobo Rainforest Building results in an even more diverse and inclusive ecosystem and provides a place for further cross-cultural and cross-sector conversations and collaborations to be had. The first touch points for many of these new relationships and collaborations come from the tribal liaisons and NMTEEP. Without the efforts of the NMTEEP, many of these connections and relationships would have never been made, and the New Mexico entrepreneurial ecosystem would remain siloed and not as inclusive to New Mexico's tribal and Native American entrepreneurs and communities.

The greatest barrier that the tribal liaisons have played a role in overcoming is developing trust amongst Indigenous entrepreneurs and the greater New Mexico entrepreneurial ecosystem. Historically, many of these communities have been both abused and taken advantage of and are weary of any "outsider" offering to "help." Since the tribal liaisons are members of the communities they work with and Native American entrepreneurs themselves, they are able to build trust in their communities. This trust leads to uncomfortable yet important and culturally sensitive conversations that can move New Mexico's entrepreneurial ecosystem forward and in a more inclusive direction.

The New Mexico Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program is a model of true and inclusive ecosystem building and can be applied to various populations, communities and ecosystems through out New Mexico and the greater United States to foster economic development moving forward that is truly "by the people and for the people."

LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Supporting Information:

- New Mexico Technology Council, Women in Tech Awards
- New Mexico Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program
- University of New Mexico Rainforest Innovations
- Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program Podcast

Articles:

- Navigating Pathways - Journeying Through the NM Rainforest Entrepreneur Ecosystem As Tribal Entrepreneurs
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building With UNM-Taos HIVE - EDA University Center Success Story
- Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program Success Story - Opening A Storefront in Indian Country
- N.M. Economic Development Partners With UNM Rainforest Innovations To Empower Underserved Entrepreneurs
- UNMRI Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program Gains Momentum With Santa Clara Pueblo Small Business Startup Day
- New Mexico's Native Entrepreneurial Ecosystem And How It Fosters Growth

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP PROGRAM

APLU and its Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP Program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP Awards Program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- Talent and workforce development
- Innovation, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- Place development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP