

The New Mexico Blueprint for Civic Engagement

GREG WEBB

Greg Webb is the executive director of the New Mexico Commission for Community Volunteerism, a bipartisan group appointed by the governor. The Commission is charged with promoting volunteerism, guiding Corporation for National and Community Service grant expenditures in New Mexico, and promoting an ethic of service across the state.

Since 2003, *Growing to Greatness has worked* to document the scale, scope, and impacts of service-learning and related prosocial youth development in each state. In 2006, New Mexico released the New Mexico Blueprint for Civic Engagement, which can serve as a policy model for other states.

The Blueprint provides the framework for a statewide civic engagement agenda for the next several years. It offers policy recommendations designed to strengthen and expand opportunities for the citizens of New Mexico to engage in their communities, identifies characteristics of effective civic engagement programs, and catalogs current opportunities for involvement across the state. The Blueprint is offered here as a model for other states to consider as they look to promote greater civic engagement among their own citizens.

With backing from Governor Bill Richardson and Lieutenant Governor Diane D. Denish, the New Mexico Commission for Community

Volunteerism led a grassroots effort to bring stakeholders from many different sectors — service-learning, national and community service, volunteerism, philanthropy, and more — into the planning process. They held town meetings and collected input from state and national leaders, with financial support from the New Mexico Community Foundation and the Messengers of the Healing Winds Foundation.

The Blueprint that has resulted from this process reflects a multiyear plan that can help New Mexico citizens make a case to their legislature for funding policies that will create a coherent, comprehensive vision of civic engagement in the state.

Specific policy recommendations are organized around four themes:

Environmental Needs, Job Skills, At-Risk Youths, and Young Adults

- Create a conservation corps to respond to natural disasters, provide youth employment, and prepare young people for college and life.
- Create a youth civic justice corps for young people transitioning out of foster care or juvenile detention.
- Support full-time service for tribal youth in Native communities.
- Match AmeriCorps funds dollar-for-dollar with state funds.

Academic Programs and Service-Learning

- Require New Mexico schools to offer service-learning opportunities to all students and provide incentives for student participation.

- Require that 50 percent of all higher education work-study funds go to community-service settings in New Mexico.
- Match Corporation for National and Community Service Education Awards to AmeriCorps members in New Mexico with scholarship funds for New Mexico colleges.

Service and Volunteer Opportunities

- Increase the capacity of existing volunteer and service centers and create up to five new centers.
- Revise applicable laws and statutes so that criminal offenders make “community restitution” rather than perform “community service.”
- Explore providing state employees with two hours of paid leave per month to serve a nonprofit of their choice.

State Investments

- Commission a study to increase the efficiency of all federal and state resources that support civic engagement.
- Invest \$30 million in an endowed fund to support service-learning and other youth development strategies statewide.

The Blueprint recognizes that there is a direct relationship between civic engagement, electoral, and ethics reform. The

Commission supports public election financing and election-day voter registration to increase voter turnout, as well as measures to restore confidence in government by requiring campaign finance reporting and lobbying guidelines.

Full funding of all the initiatives in the Blueprint is projected to require \$50 million in state money. The Blueprint’s crafters recognize that full funding isn’t feasible, but the plan has allowed them to identify initial targets, and work with stakeholders across New Mexico toward reaching them. By inventorying volunteer opportunities, identifying best practices, and defining key terms, the Blueprint offers a practical approach to civic engagement that goes beyond simple rhetoric to implementation.

The full report can be accessed at www.newmexserve.org/docs/FinalBlueprint.pdf.