



Article 372

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Venture Acceleration Fund Helps Native-Owned Businesses

By Kathy Keith, Executive Director, Regional Development Corporation

Native-owned businesses in Northern New Mexico are eligible for grants of up to \$25,000 to spend on specialized services that will help them increase revenues and create jobs.

One business, Than Povi Gallery, was awarded a Native American Venture Acceleration Fund grant in February 2014 to develop a marketing plan and ad campaign for the business, which moved in 2013 from San Ildefonso Pueblo to a site north of Santa Fe on U.S. 84/285. That move was partially enabled by a NAVAF grant in 2013, co-owner Elmer Torres said, and resulted in “a lot more foot traffic.”



Kathy Keith

Torres and his wife, Deborah, both members of the pueblo, eventually hope to move their gallery to downtown Santa Fe so the many artists they represent can get greater exposure. In the meantime, though, their current location allows them to sell to a broader market. “We try to make (artworks) affordable for people in the local area,” Torres said.



Elmer Torres, center

Another business, Cochiti Community Development Corporation (CCDC), plans to use its 2014 grant to upgrade its accounting system and support the pueblo's membership in Quality New Mexico, a nonprofit group that promotes business excellence. The CCDC leveraged its NAVAF award to hire more than a dozen local workers to repair roads and infrastructure damaged by floods directly related to soil instability following the 2011 Las Conchas Fire. Pueblo member Phoebe Suina and her business partner Ryan Weiss co-founded High Water Mark — a floodplain management company — to help the pueblo manage this complex project, and they credit their success to the NAVAF funds that backed CCDC.

“Heavy equipment operators, construction managers, project managers — we hire these positions from the local labor pool now,” Weiss said. “Our Pueblo communities are being strengthened all around from the work High Water Mark is performing.”

Getting Off the Ground

Los Alamos National Security LLC, the company that manages Los Alamos National Laboratory, in partnership with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, created the NAVAf fund to help Native-owned businesses create jobs, expand revenue and develop and diversify the economy of Northern New Mexico. The Regional Development Corporation of Española manages the fund through the Los Alamos Connect program. In 2014, \$60,000 was distributed in the fund's second round of disbursements.

To be eligible for a Native American VAF grant, applicants must be a Native American-owned business, which means the tribe or tribal members must have a minimum 51 percent stake in the enterprise. Business principals must be affiliated with the pueblos of Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Santa Clara, Pojoaque, Taos, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Cochiti or Jemez and be located in Sandoval, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, San Miguel, Mora, Rio Arriba or Taos counties. The maximum grant amount is \$25,000.

Grants are competitively awarded and aim to provide services to tribal business entities that will allow the company to diversify revenue, leverage other investments, create new jobs and install systems that lead to growth. Cash awards are not made directly to awardees but are paid to the service providers approved by the grantees.

The deadline for submitting grant proposals is 5 p.m. Nov. 20. For more information about the Native American Venture Acceleration Fund, contact RDC Executive Director Kathy Keith (Kathy@rdcnm.org) or Vangie Trujillo (vangie@lanl.gov) of LANL's Community Programs Office. To download the application, visit http://bit.ly/FNM_NAVAF.

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