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## **Webinar Series Extends Economic Development Outreach Statewide**

*By Sandy Nelson for Finance New Mexico*

Creating and expanding businesses is essential to economic development in rural New Mexico, and broadband internet access is essential to helping those ventures succeed. In fact, few businesses anywhere in the state can reach all potential customers without fast, reliable and affordable connections to the web.



To share information about existing resources and suggest how broadband-deficient communities can obtain better service, the New Mexico Economic Development Department (NMEDD) recently hosted a webinar under the auspices of its FundIt initiative.

FundIt is a 3-year-old federal-state partnership that helps businesses secure start-to-finish financing for projects that stimulate infrastructure development, job creation and small-business development. It also hosts public meetings and webinars that alert economic developers, municipal leaders and businesses to capital projects that might interest their communities.

### **Critical Connections**

In July, FundIt's seminar on broadband access introduced two dozen attendees to the work of the state Department of Information Technology (DoIT), a Cabinet-level department that collaborates with NMEDD on internet access programs.

Featured speaker George Clarke, manager of the New Mexico Geospatial and Broadband Program, explained what the DoIT Office of Broadband and Geospatial Initiatives (OBGI) is doing to help communities — especially those in geographically isolated parts of the state — navigate the often complex process of getting affordable, high-speed internet service.

Successful programs include E-Rate, which primarily funds broadband installation in schools with significant help from the federal government, and the CASA crowd sourcing application, which allows residents to explore their surroundings for broadband providers and “community anchor institutions,” such as libraries and schools, to see what services are available.

The ultimate goal of the state's broadband initiatives, according to Juan Torres, finance development director at NMEDD, is to support infrastructure development statewide because

“broadband is a critical component in health care delivery via telemedicine, education via distance learning, and public safety.”

## A Good Fit

Broadband access is just the kind of project that FundIt was formed to create, according to Johanna Nelson, a finance development specialist at NMEDD who helps manage FundIt’s outreach series.

FundIt helps New Mexico communities coordinate funding for projects — such as downtown revitalization, business incubation, housing and infrastructure — that require multiple sources of money. Its partner organizations help community leaders find financing and clear regulatory hurdles for feasible economic development projects.

Upcoming FundIt webinars include a workshop on how small businesses and agricultural producers can reduce energy consumption (September 19) and a session on how to improve approaches to obtaining funding for community projects (September 27). To register for these free webinars, [visit https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7031994069911804162](https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7031994069911804162), Webinar ID: 628-325-763.

Community leaders interested in knowing more about FundIt and other planned webinars can contact Johanna Nelson at 505-827-0264 or [Johanna.Nelson@state.nm.us](mailto:Johanna.Nelson@state.nm.us). Businesses with a project that might qualify for funding should contact their local economic development representative, found in the contact section of the NMEDD website at [gonm.biz](http://gonm.biz). For a list of current FundIt projects, visit <http://www.ristraproject.com/site/2215>.

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