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Crash Course Helps Community Leaders Plan for Sustained Growth

By *Finance New Mexico*

New Mexico communities that plan and prepare for economic development can avoid the chaotic impacts of runaway growth by training the elected officials, public employees and civic leaders who promote that change. A crash course in basic economic development from July 22-26 at Western New Mexico University in Silver City is a good place to start that training.



The course is one of several offered by the New Mexico-based International Academy for Economic Development that prepares students for certification by the International Economic Development Council.

Participants at the annual seminar will learn basic economic development theory and examine how New Mexico's communities have coped — successfully and poorly — with population changes and the related effects on public services. From there, they will consider how to apply what they've learned to the challenges of stimulating sustainable job and business growth in their own communities.

“The basic course (offers) a broad-based overview of economic development,” said Savannah Jermance, economic development and business relations manager for the City of Rio Rancho and a member of the committee that chose this year's coursework. “In the past we've done a case study and tried to tie in all the topics of the course.”

This year, participants will study the dynamics of economic evolution in two or three New Mexico counties: Doña Ana, San Juan or Sierra. The point of this exercise is to understand the benefits of planning for the changes that come when a city attracts new businesses, visitors and residents.

The class, held each year since 1993, suits anyone interested in economic development or community improvement, Jermance said: “Elected officials, civil servants in any way shape or form. Even if you're involved in one facet of government, ... you see how your function fits with others. It's important to see how your job fits into the greater picture of economic prosperity.”

Economic development has evolved in the 25 years that the course has been offered, and organizers have responded by delivering methodologies that can be applied to local challenges. At the 2017 workshop, Jermance led participants through a SWOT analysis that demonstrated ways economic developers can position their communities. A SWOT analysis — which inventories strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats — is typically used by businesses to create a market niche and marketing plan.

This year's topics include planning, research, marketing, business retention and expansion, real estate, ethics, how to develop small businesses and the local work force, and how to manage an economic development organization and tap into existing resources.

Last year, 30 individuals representing tribes, cities and rural areas participated, including some from New Mexico's neighboring states and from Mexico. "The diverse audience is a testament to the many areas the course touches on," said Jermance.

Because enrollment is limited to 40, people are urged to register by July 9.

The \$500 fee (\$600 for out-of-state attendees) covers registration, books and course materials. An event fee of \$200 covers all scheduled meals, field trips, and the welcoming reception. Rural scholarships are available by calling 505-710-7172 or visiting www.IAEcondev.org. A dorm room for the five-day workshop costs \$170, or participants can stay at a local hotel. To register, visit <https://sb.wnmu.edu/nmedc/>.

Three hours of undergraduate credit are available to course participants for \$150.

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