



Collaborating to have the most impact

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For grant making organizations like the United Way of Northern New Mexico (UWNNM), it is crucial that their financial grants to nonprofits have the greatest possible impact. Their current collaborative, research-based approach looks to ensure that happens.

Historically, UWNNM followed the standard model of funding a range of agencies, but not getting involved in the co-ordination or direction of the specific programs the agencies ran.

Starting in 2013, however, UWNNM started looking more intentionally at assessing the detailed needs of the communities they served (Los Alamos and Rio Arriba counties), to make sure local challenges were receiving the attention they deserved.

"We started working with a range of organizations, businesses and individuals to identify gaps in services and areas that required real attention," says Kristy Ortega, former director of UWNNM, who was instrumental in adjusting the organization's focus.

It became clear that support for behavioral health and mental health was particularly needed: improving access to mental health service providers and substance abuse programs, along with education and preventative initiatives around these issues.

UWNNM then collaborated with organizations to develop programs to fill those gaps, and refocused its Community Action Fund to support nonprofits that addressed key needs.

"We're still funding nonprofits, but with a more strategic focus on a coherent approach, and a clear set of metrics to allow us to measure the impact," Ortega says.

Individuals and organizations including Los Alamos National Laboratory and Lab managing operator Los Alamos National Security, LLC, support the Community Action Fund, with Lab employees being major donors. Investors in the Community Action Fund can make a general donation, or choose to support one of the focus areas (behavioral and mental health programs, education, financial stability and health).

A competitive grant process for certified 501(c)(3) organizations takes place with applications sent out in March and decisions made by June, with priority given to applicants that impact one of UWNNM's identified focus areas.

In 2017 United Way of Northern New Mexico [funded 29 non-profit organizations](#) through the Community Action Fund.

The Behavioral Health Initiative

Building on the success of this model, in 2016 UWNNM formed the Behavioral Health Initiative, a group comprising UWNNM, local therapists, first responders and community members that meet regularly to assess progress and explore additional responses to behavioral health issues.

The initiative has supported training in mental health first aid for local law enforcement and first responders, advocated to bring mid-level therapists back on to the Blue Cross Blue Shield network, and helped those without means receive mental/behavioral health services.

In addition, the initiative also created a program in partnership with the Laboratory's Occupational Medicine Department to provide information on behavioral and mental health to Laboratory employees through a brown bag lunch series. UWNNM is also involved in planning a behavioral health symposium and round-table discussion.

“This group has given us a great opportunity to share resources and ideas on how to work together and get information out to the broader community,” says Ortega.

- You can learn more about the UWNNM Community Action Fund here

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