

## The Village Investment and Development Act (VIDA): Advocating for New Mexico's Frontier and Remote Communities



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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **The Village Investment and Development Act (VIDA): Advocating for New Mexico's Frontier and Remote Communities**

### **VIDA's Goal**

The goal of VIDA is to facilitate equitable investment in frontier communities. Equitable investment in frontier regions of the state may require:

- The Legislature to commit to statewide, long-term investments.
- State programs to eliminate geographic bias in resource allocation.
- Investment in education, access to skilled professionals and/or capacity improvement to allow communities to reach their identified goals and to access resources.
- Innovative funding solutions for large and small projects in neglected communities.

The VIDA initiative encourages the state of New Mexico to enact a bottom-up, micro-planning process for extending resources to the smallest and most isolated frontier communities.

Requiring participatory planning and budgeting will assure that grassroots ideas and adequate capacity on the ground are considered in addressing local needs.

### **Background**

Frontier communities across New Mexico are unique. They are the most sparsely populated and geographically isolated communities and an indispensable part of our state's heritage and historical and future identities.

Yet, New Mexico's frontier communities face unique economic and social challenges. They have higher unemployment, a higher proportion of older and disabled residents, and lower educational attainment, often due to limited access to basic services. These communities have less access to health care, childcare, healthy food, adequate housing, broadband and reliable transportation. These challenges call for innovative solutions designed on the ground in frontier communities with input from those who know it best.

In 2017, advocates for the smallest and most neglected communities in New Mexico reached out to legislators with a mission statement describing the ways in which sparsely populated and isolated communities across New Mexico can overcome severe economic and social challenges. These cannot be overcome without assistance from federal, state, and/or local government.

The 2017 goal for VIDA was to prepare and pass a Legislative Memorial to convene a stakeholder group designated by the Legislature to conduct a study of the state's most remote communities, creating an opportunity for the smallest and most isolated communities to identify/prioritize their essential needs, and to recommend to the Legislature new pathways for investing in infrastructure and social capital in frontier villages. The late fall of the year, the Interim Economic and Rural Development Committee received a presentation on the VIDA proposal and unanimously backed pre-filing a committee supported bi-partisan Memorial in the 2018 session.

During the 2018 Legislative session Senate Joint Memorial 2 directed the Legislative Council Service to “Establish a Working Group to Identify the Challenges Unique to Frontier Communities and Propose Legislative Action.” Individuals and organizations from around the state came together to support the Memorial. Especially helpful were the NM Association of Counties, the NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council, the NM Farmers’ Marketing Association, the Rural Development Council, the Association of Regional Councils and others. Despite the odds of getting bills and memorials through the Legislature in the brief 30-day session, a statewide, bi-partisan effort led to the passage.

In preparation for the 2019 Legislative session VIDA updates were presented to the Economic and Rural Development and the Health and Human Services Interim Committees. During the 2019 session SB102 and HB194 were pre-filed. The bills called for a one-time appropriation for the workgroup, demonstrating the Legislature’s continued support for the investment and reinvestment of state resources in isolated/remote communities in the state, whether incorporated or unincorporated. In the end, \$50,000 for the VIDA workgroup was included in “House Bill 2 Junior” (HB548). Surprisingly, Governor Lujan Grisham line-item-vetoed the \$50,000 appropriation passed by the Legislature despite more than three years of preparation and Legislative support, passage by seven committees and House and Senate floor votes.

Through funding from the McCune Charitable Foundation, NCFC in partnership with other frontier advocates, including those mentioned above, formed a statewide planning group to carry on the VIDA work, although at a much reduced level. The results are described below and will further inform and support VIDA.

### **Understanding New Mexico’s Frontier and Remote Communities**

To gain better understanding of New Mexico’s remote communities, the advisory group carried out three initiatives. First, it worked with the New Mexico Community Data Collaborative to map data that tell the story of NM’s most remote communities. Second, a literature search was conducted to better understand current models and state and national initiatives that facilitate equitable investment in frontier communities. Finally, focus groups were conducted to provide a deeper look at the assets and challenges faced by two New Mexico’s frontier communities.

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## **I. Story Maps**

The statewide planning group met to identify key questions and indicators to paint a picture of remote and frontier communities in New Mexico. We were interested in capturing the unique character of remote communities and therefore, settled on using the federal Far and Remote Designation. This designation was developed through a multi-year partnership between an advisory group which included NCFC, the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Services (USDA-ERS) and the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy at the Health Resources Service Administration and finalized in 2015.

According to USDA's website, frontier and remote (FAR) is used here to describe places characterized by some combination of low population size and high geographic remoteness. FAR areas are defined in relation to the time it takes to travel by car to the edges of nearby urban areas. There are four FAR levels that take into account varying degrees of remoteness and population how difficult it is to access "high order" goods and services, such as advanced medical procedures, stores selling major household appliances, regional airport hubs, or professional sports franchises or "low order" goods and services, such as grocery stores, gas stations, and basic health-care services. For the mapping, places in New Mexico with a population of 5000 or less (both incorporated and unincorporated) that met FAR levels three and four were used to reflect a high degree of remoteness.

A long list of indicators/measures were identified by advisory group members and grouped around five key questions. NCFC staff worked with NMCDRC to narrow the indicators to those that are accessible at a small geography; in this case census tracts.

The VIDA story map seeks insight into the conditions of New Mexico's most remote communities, and how these conditions impact overall community health and well-being.

Five guiding questions are posed:

1. Who lives there?
2. How are they doing economically?
3. What are the conditions of community infrastructure?
4. What are the health conditions?
5. What are the environmental conditions?

To access the VIDA Story Map,  
[CLICK HERE](#)



## **II. Two Case Studies**

To gain a better understanding of the things that impact the well-being of New Mexico's remote communities, focus groups were conducted in two communities. Advisory group members were asked to identify frontier and remote communities that would be good candidates for the focus groups. Criteria for selection included: active community leadership; an identified issue or project the community is working on to improve community well-being; success in leveraging assets or existing resources; data or information that was been produced regarding this issue/project; and evidence of partnerships or collaboration. Five communities were identified and screening interviews were conducted with each. Abiquiu and Cuba New Mexico were selected for the case studies.

The **foundational research questions** that were the basis of the case studies are:

- What has been happening to New Mexico's frontier and remote communities, and how have these changes impacted overall community health (in the broadest possible definition of that term)?
- Where do community members and any other stakeholders see the community moving, who are the key stakeholders continuing to provide leadership, and what do they need?

These overarching questions were broken down into smaller questions to better understand the factors that contribute to the community's success and any systemic, technical or policy challenges. The results of the case studies are summarized below.

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## **Case Study #1: Abiquiu, New Mexico**

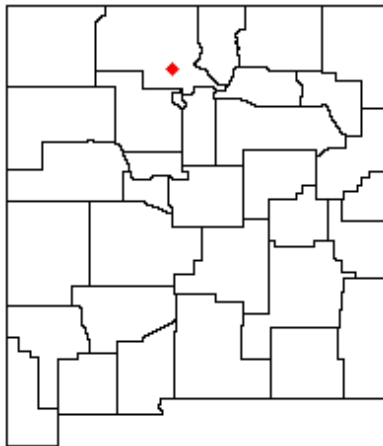
### **Background**

Abiquiú is a small, unincorporated census-designated place located in Rio Arriba County, in northern New Mexico about 53 miles north of Santa Fe. Also known as Pueblo de Abiquiu, it was first settled in the 1700s by Tewa Pueblo families. In 1754, New Mexican governor Tomas Velez Cachupin gave 34 genizaro families a land grant, one of the few ways for them to become landowners. The genizaros were American Indians of various tribes whose origin was as slaves, captives, and servants of the Spanish.



The genizaros were American Indians of various tribes whose origin was as slaves, captives, and servants of the Spanish. Throughout the 19th century, the residents of Abiquiú struggled to retain ownership of the 16,000 acre land grant. In 1894, the rights of the community to the land was legally validated and in 1969, additional land, previously designated as National Forest, was returned to the community.

Colorful canyons and mountains surrounding Abiquiú has attracted artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and numerous film crews. Popular nearby points of interest include Ghost Ranch, Georgia O'Keeffe home and studio, Abiquiu Lake and the Dar al-Islam education center. It is a popular tourist attraction and over the past century famous actors and artists have purchased land surrounding Abiquiu.



Abiquiu's is currently home to about 230 permanent residents. It has one elementary school; the Santa Tomas Church and the Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center are located off the main plaza.



## Summary of Responses from the Abiquiu Focus Group

A focus group was conducted on November 11, 2019 at the Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center. Eight people participated.

### **1. What have been the community's greatest challenges, key issues and opportunities over the past 10-20 years?**

1970's:

- El Rito College had a lot to do with bringing in educational opportunities in mechanics, plumbing and cosmetology.
- There was a strong back to the land movement that included renewable energy. One participant commented that he had joined a 40-acre land trust that was established during this time, where each person purchased one acre and shared gardening and raising cows. This didn't end up working out and most people went elsewhere.
- Two gas stations were established in El Rito.
- Douglas Johnson, a successful businessman, had moved in and employed several kids to help build his house.
- Ghost Ranch was active and Georgia O'Keeffe was still alive.
- There was one school established. Schools had been parochial before then.

1980's

- Schools became part of the Espanola School District.
- A challenge was that there were no early childhood places for kids. This was kind of a problem. There was something at the parish for low-income people. However, teachers are low income too. Head Start, Los Cumbres, etc. were for low income people only. Many people are living in a rural area but work in Santa Fe or Los Alamos. This was a far distance for childcare.
- Long distance to travel for jobs – Move residents started commuting to Santa Fe, Espanola, Los Alamos.
- Activism – first place to vote was at La Raza Unida
- Northern NM College in Espanola offered educational opportunities and certificate programs in computers, administration, and secretarial skills.
- The Abiquiu elementary school was built.
- Las Clinicas del Norte opened its Abiquiu site.
- There was more collaboration between Ghost Ranch and Abiquiu. There was a Community Director position then that provided activities for area families, like swimming; that position no longer exists.
- Dar al Islam arrived. The organization owned Abiquiu Inn and land on both sides of the river. Land was Saudi owned at the time. It was believed that if you went through Abiquiu you ended up in mecca.

1990s

- Wealthy people came in and bought Dar Al Islam and the black hills behind. They were

going to do big developments, but they went bust. Wealthy person bought all this land, became a philanthropist, and when she got tired and pulled out, people lost jobs,

- The Abiquiu Library started.
- Started doing artists in the schools. Recruited by Roger Montoya. Beginning was local artists, not true anymore. Music and art; some people from the pueblos.
- A local Farmers Market was around.
- Broadband grant in 1999, but started patient records in 1996
- Library established as the only 501c3. Luciente was the first 501c3 and the library was part of it and then they split.
- There was a presenter from Los Alamos who spoke about how great technology was. For what we are concerned, it doesn't reach these areas.
- Market study – first data circuit in Rio Arriba. Used that one to reach out.
- Community Foundations started coming out here.

#### 2000's

- 2000 had the first internet.
- There were medical transcribers positions at the clinic. However, there became no need for these positions anymore because they switched to electronic software that did it.
- 2005: Started getting grants for the archives and mapping the graveyard.
- The library split from Luciente ... to have the library locally controlled. There used to be mostly business people on board and now more people from the Village. The intent was to amplify the people and the Pueblo de Abiquiu Library.
- The Rio Arriba County Rural Event Center was built in 2010

#### 2010's

- Began to feel the impact of tourism.
- Film Industry came in (e.g. *Bless Me Ultima*).
- Wealthy people are moving in, take water rights, increase housing costs, leave, and give nothing back to the community. Don't bother to connect to people here.
- A Community Comprehensive Plan is introduced by wealthy people. Ended up with one done.
- Planning and zoning– land grant became a political subdivision of state in 2007.
- Farm tours, studio tours get started.
- Relationship to Berkley Abiquiu Collaborative (BACA) opportunity started in 2014.
- O'Keefe Foundation (relationship to village – philanthropy to the village) to museum (stopped funding anything, take impact tourism)

## 2. What have been the community's efforts to stabilize, rebuild and/or grow?

- Book mobile established
- Dental mobile established
- # 1 for agriculture in NM (orchards). However, it was still a distance to go to Espanola for staples such as coffee, flour, etc. This was one of the last self-sustainable communities.
- New elementary school built.

- Genizaro history and movement grew in NM because of conferences in Abiquiu. DNA project. Pride in community, culture, etc. Old Santa Fe Trail.
- Had AmeriCorps and community garden. Youth were given a stipend, did gardening, investigated in new tools versus old tools, supplied vegetables for healthy cooking classes as Las Clinicas.
- Acequia Association
- New clinic in Abiquiu – a branch of Las Clinicas del Norte
- Formed Rio Arriba Independent Libraries (RAIL) – Must raise all funds because they are unincorporated and not in state library system to be eligible to receive \$60,000 a year. Went to county for help but later lost it. All libraries have a different character but are related.
- In Rio Arriba County, there are only two incorporated towns – Espanola and Chama; all others are unincorporated.
- Phone companies have come and gone.
- Mil levy established for 5 school districts in Santa Fe and Rio Arriba Counties. It passed with 60 percent of votes. This meant that trades would be taught again at El Rito campus. This was a collaboration with high schools to go work at expansion for Los Alamos.
- Renewable energy
- Communication became better. Library now has computers with internet.
- BACA – History building project.
- John Bosshard bought and beautifully restored the old mercantile building and the Gonzales House
- A brand new non-profit under the Luciente umbrella: Prosperity Kids!, encouraging family saving for education.
- Our Volunteer Fire Department is thriving and is a very positive force in the community.
- The Abiquiu News, a weekly email newsletter, has become a wonderful community builder.

### **3. How has the community's overall health been impacted by these trends?**

- Jobs: Work was Abiquiu Dam and highways. Ghost Ranch, schools/education were other opportunities. Men left and went to Colorado for mining and sheep herding. This made the women independent – food growing, farm productions.
- Los Alamos impacted the farm community.
- Girls needing birth control, getting pregnant.
- Architecture – traded our wealth for money and lost at every turn. Homebuilding/construction. With no cash. But once you had money you could get in debt. Lost land and water rights. Then modular housing is all you could afford.
- Richard Cook (Cook's store) – Huge sand and gravel business guy.
- Rio Arriba (one of the poorest county) next to the one with the most millionaires.
- Los Alamos was a very segregated town. Hispanics couldn't stay at night. There is still lots of discrimination that exists there today.

**4. If you could re-do anything that the community tried that didn't work well, what would that be?**

- Refuse Los Alamos.
- Keep an ongoing relationship with Ghost Ranch – it was positive. It brought communities all together. It became real simplified and then dissolved. More recently outreach from Ghost Ranch to put together. Keep changing directors.
  - Lot of turnover in Ghost Ranch, churches, and land grants. No leadership continuity.
- Oil and gas – discovered about to put a well next door. Contacted people in other communities to get help. Alerting people. (about 5 years ago) Went to talk to people in Taos at BLM. They were not enthusiastic. At least in Cibola put on hold.
- Wanted to do uranium mining. Big drop in uranium price. Someone did a seminar on how to destroy equipment. Mostly attended by FBI.
- Started a wool and yarn mill. Wool association. Change – decentralized under the production of the people. Marketing co-ops.
- Abiquiu not being recognized as an ancient pueblo before the land grant.
- Considered the next Santa Fe (HH giving out brochures). Dividing factor.

**5. Has the presence or absence of a nearby town or small city had an impact on your community's health and wellness? Has a major highway or state road made an impact? If so, what are the impacts?**

- O'Keeffe Museum - Same thing with no return to community.
- Dollar Store - Two petitions – One started out against and the next one locals were in favor of the dollar stores. They see it as a way to save costs, as well as food because of monopolism of Bode's.
- Rio Arriba La Raza Unida Party moved into electoral democratic politics. (was a movement and political party from the 60s – 80s) – Sparked Chicano movements and influence of Sieta del Norte and clinics.
- Alcoholism and heroin – There used to be more bars within 2 or 3 miles. Alcohol density license requirements expand distances. A lot of people from out of state wreck here because they don't know the curves in the road.
- County Roads – Over the years that county has put in county road signs and numbers; residents now have physical address. Paving the roads completely changed the road condition and made [more] traffic. They are no longer conducive to walking etc. Corps of engineers tourism – roads, trails. (no money going into people). Road to Ojo Caliente – it is a WHIP highway to facilitate Los Alamos. This disrupted agriculture.
- Abiquiu walking tours - Have helped inform outsiders about the history and heritage of Abiquiu.
- There is a new and energetic president at the tiny college in El Rito (a branch of Northern NM). He is instituting classes and AA degrees in trades, beginning with plumbers and electricians. He is also feeding and clothing students in need.

**6. What is most important to you to help with community building as you move forward?  
Partnerships and supports?**

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“The biggest export is our kids”.

– Abiquiu Focus Group Participant

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- Technology - Technology = new career opportunities
- Food - People went to cash jobs rather than self-sustaining (division, high walls, etc.). Everything was canned. Food would keep community together. It would be wonderful to have space for kids to sell foods. Attempt for that on Tuesday.
- Church – what has happened in Archdiocese (exposure of sexual abuse) has had huge impact. Before support for social issues (troubled marriage, alcoholism, gathering of activity, youth activities, could go to church for troubles.) Church is not as open armed. So, there is nowhere to go.
- Places for Youth - 4-H club, library, early literacy. Northern Youth Project does have a garden; it’s a pretty successful program. Library has DSL – saves people a bill at home (e.g. when gas prices went up). Library is a safe place for kids to go when they get off bus.
- Community Centers - County did build community centers, but they are pretty much closed because of requirements and permits. Liabilities and insurance are a big issue. Rural event center does have a commercial kitchen, but it does not get used. Agriculture extension - nutritionist that goes into school. County used to bring free summer lunch here (but no more). Disconnection with rural event center. Agricultural extension runs it. Not enough money put into it. The county builds a building and then doesn’t support a staff.
- County Commissioners - Local people we can talk to one-on-one.
- Digital Archives - Opens doors and information and the stories provided from within. Trained kids to be archivists. Have spurred careers. Have been doing conferences (3).

**7. What sort of resources do you need, and how do you want to partner with others?**

Resource Type	Description of Resource and How It Is Used in Partnership
Hemp production	<p>Acequias Association is good about providing information. Opportunity for production of materials in communities. Hemp growers need places to dry.</p> <p>NRCS – provides programming through Farm Bill – EQUIP – help to level lands for more efficiency and build high tunnels. Manufacturing products said to happen through communities. Need to work together. A lot of people try to do the same thing but divided.</p>

Glean Local Produce	A need for youth to pick fruit that is not being picked. Youth program for youth to glean. Rural event center could then be used – there is a commercial kitchen.
Recreation Center for Kids & Seniors	Maybe gym could be re-activated. Local non-profit. Ceramic, bingo, walking in doors etc. for the seniors. Skills and traditions to be imparted to kids – seniors as a resource for kids. Oral history at library has been between youth and kids.
Use Existing Facilities	Must fund programming not just buildings. Facilities are available but not used. Need to make available for community. Free use of commercial kitchen.
Training and Education Opportunities	There is a lack of job training and job opportunities. We need more small businesses. We need to foster entrepreneurial spirit in our young people. There is a new and energetic president at the tiny college in El Rito (a branch of Northern NM). He is instituting classes and AA degrees in trades, beginning with plumbers and electricians.

**8. How do you see your community 10 years from now?**

Issue	Description
Organization	Many groups that are working on same mission and in the same direction. Not duplicating efforts.
Leadership	Two committees are being formed to call on land grant and church to take lead. People are asking for leadership. Form committees to manage tourism.
Connect with food.	Entrepreneur development. Agri-tourism – more one to one relationships.
Management of gym + Library and gym partnership	Partnership with gym. We used to have dances with gym. Potential resource for cultural enjoyment. Could do workshops there and basketball.
Fire Department	No longer have this. By the time they get here the structure has burned.
Access to clinic that is 24 hours.	Bills to be airlifted if there is an emergency. Example of husband having a heart attack. Los Alamos to Sandoval. Helicopter ride more expensive than complicated surgery. Then need to sell land.  Need staffing for clinics.
Better Schools and Access to Education	More vocational training opportunities
Decentralize Amazon	Our warehouse for packing and labeling for artists, etc. Source of high value good. The amount of talents.
Form marketing co-op.	Have had calls for bulk calves. But have not been able to supply. Could use the facilities to do this.

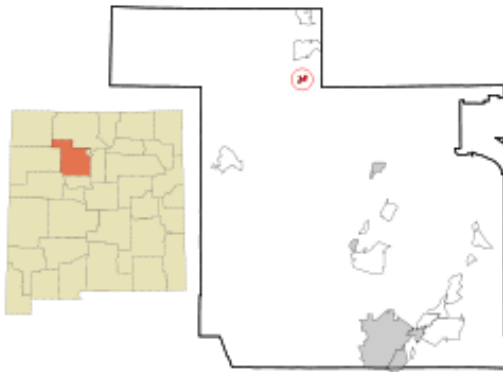
## Case Study #2: Cuba, New Mexico

**Background:** The village of Cuba, originally named Nacimiento, was first settled on the banks of the Rio Puerco in 1736. Three decades later, a group of 36 settlers petitioned the governor of New Mexico Province for land which became known as the San Joaquin del Nacimiento Land Grant. By 1887 census there were over 200 families—primarily farmers and ranchers—living on the grant. A series of legal battles over the years left the size of the grant substantially reduced.<sup>1</sup>



Cuba's location made it a center for travel to the northwest from Albuquerque and Bernalillo and was the nearest town for many on the Navajo and Apache reservations. It also serves small communities in the area, including Cabezon (formerly named La Posta), Guadalupe, La Ventana, San Luis, Lindrith, Gallina, Regina, Lybrook, Counselor, and La Jara. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba businesses thrived, including a sawmill, flour mill, hotel, mercantile, and freight hauler. Cattle and natural resources were the driving forces of the local economy for centuries and nearby mines produced copper, gold, and silver. The logging industry was served by a rail line from Bernalillo. The logging industry ceased in the 1960's.

Numerous studies starting in the early 20th century indicate that climatic and geographic factors accelerated erosion in the 1870s-1890s. The extreme arroyo cutting resulted in a drop in the water table which meant loss of irrigation water for crops and animals. Today the village of Cuba and the surrounding area suffers from severe drought.



Cuba was incorporated in 1964; a health clinic was opened there in 1973. Cuba still serves as a hub to stock up on supplies by residents as well as campers in the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) and hikers in the San Pedro Parks Wilderness Area. Cuba is surrounded by archaeological sites and is also a supply point for those going on to Chaco Culture National Historic Park, a World Heritage Site about 1-1/2 hours north on Highway 550 (formerly Highway 44)

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<sup>1</sup> Jemez Valley History: Village of Cuba. Retrieved on 12/26/19 at:

## Summary of Responses from the Cuba Focus Group

A focus group was conducted on November 19, 2019 at the . Nine people participated. The amount of time they have all worked and/or lived in the area ranges from 20 to 45 years.

### **1. What have been the community's greatest challenges, key issues and opportunities over the past 10-20 years?**

*1990 to 2000:*

- Construction of Hwy 550. Cuba is subject to mini [economic] booms and mini busts. Hwy 550 brought in new people and business for about a year. There was some discussion during the planning phase about whether or not the highway was going to go through Cuba or not. The fact that they choose the route they did led to a job boom for about 2 years. Since then jobs have come and go.
- Chronic disease among the population, diabetes, heart disease, obesity. Poor nutrition
- Transportation – how to get to so many different things, like higher education and health care.
- Living where we live, everything is 2 hours away, like doctors, grocery store, etc. “Big city stuff “
- Half of the community drives to Las Alamos for work in 1.5 hours each way.
- Highway was a plus. Including for those who commute here. However, the public transit schedule is terrible. Bus comes from Bernalillo to here but doesn't have good return routes.
- Housing is a problem. No place for folks to live. Therefore, many commute from Bernalillo or Albuquerque (e.g. teachers, health care providers, etc.). Affordable housing is also an issue.
- We didn't get closer to the city...the city got closer to us. Rio Rancho was growing rapidly and expanding.
- Aging population. All young people have moved for jobs. We have ½ to ¼ of the amount of students compared to when I taught there [at the local school].
- We used to have classes that came from Espanola Community College. You could get an associate degree or take courses. At one time it was a very vital part of the community. People would look forward to it and get an Associate's degree if that's what they wanted to do.
- Many want to have educational opportunities online but we don't have the ability here.
- No broadband during this time frame.

*2010 to 2019*

- Health Coverage - One of the biggest challenges is the high percentage of Native Americans who receive their health services solely through the Indian Health Service (IHS). Educating about other opportunities like Medicaid and other options other than just IHS.
- McDonalds, Dialysis Center, Family Dollar, AMI Kids (Private Juvenile Center), fertilizer



plant and Subway are all new businesses during this decade.

- County Fair Grounds is a generous gift from Intel. It was formerly owned and operated by another entity and was purchased by Intel and turned over to the County. Significant employers.
- Not much employment here. Some of the major employers include AMI, the PHS clinic, U.S. Forest Service and schools,
- Families used to sustain themselves by ranching but the younger population is not interested anymore. It is not seen as a sustainable job. Those who do ranch work other jobs to sustain ranching.
- Jobs is a reason people move.
- Don't have economic support to raise cattle. It is seen more like a "hobby" and less as a way to make a living. Cannot sustain yourself and raise a family. The price of cattle is low and then there is the drought. Price is inconsistent.
- Younger folks leave because there are no jobs. There is low turnover for current jobs and they have to go somewhere else.
- More volunteerism in the last 10 years than previously. Trails, food pantry, and support services for the community are done by volunteers and there are a lot of really cool things going on because of that. Recently, we had 55 people show up for clean-up day.
- In my neighborhood it's the opposite. The 75-year-olds don't want to volunteer anymore and the younger folks are not interested.
- We are in a very multi-cultural setting. It is really interesting to live in that kind of the setting.
- Cell phone has revolutionized communication. Not everyone has internet access, especially on the Reservation. Cell phone access is huge. Cell phone service is not available everywhere.
  - Many people still purchase minutes for their cell phone.
  - It's not the old radio phone and party lines. It is not quite that bad.

## **2. How has the community's overall health been impacted by these trends?**

- All of the above have all impacted the health of the community.
- All the trails that are available have had a positive impact. There are a gazillion trails. We have data and information showing improvement in physical activity. It is going to take more to see improvement in diabetes rates.
- Having Sandoval Regional Medical Center (Rio Rancho) where it is has made a difference in keeping families together and able to get care. Difference is they used to be 50%-60% no shows now 30%-45% no show. Not nearly as high as it used to be because they can do reminder calls with cell phones. Has improved patient attendance.
- My impression is less head on crashes than when the old HWY 44 was here. It was so scary. Now we have pullouts, rumble stripes, 2 lanes, etc.
- 10 years ago I started to volunteer at the food pantry. Over the past 10 years more fresh produce is available and now, half of what they leave with is fresh produce. The pantry provides 6000 pounds for 150 families. Roadrunner Food Bank is working hard to get fresh produce.

- If you give them carrots they will use it. They are taking stuff home and folks there showing recipes to make food.
- McDonalds is standing room only and people are still buying chips and soda.
- At the schools, each school, kids go fill their water bottles. They like water when its good. They like to show it off to kids from out of town about the good water here.
- Local store has improved the quality of produce.
- It might take a few years to see change. Young kids now just switching to water. School did away with soda.
- We had a farmers market for a few years . It was very successful while it lasted. It's challenging to grow gardens up here. Have to have hoop house or green house and water. We have had 8 years of drought here.
- Drought seems to have been worse the last 10 years. Drought closes national forests and that has an economic impact. The Forest Service says you have to reduce your herds.

**3. If you could re-do anything that the community tried that didn't work well, what would that be?**

- Farmers Market – it was fairly successful. It was an aging group that had veggies. It was hard to manage it. You have to depend on volunteers. There is a tiny one [Farmers' Market] in Regina. There was a lot of personality conflicts and too many rules and people not getting along. I thought it was a good idea. There was a community garden. At the school we could have horticulture class and get kids more in to it and learning more about it.
- Enjoy eating fresh produce and started teaching a health class. Health classes vary year to year depending on the teacher. When garden gets growing, students are out of school for the summer.
- Ranching – young people not sticking to ranching. Can't make a living. Maybe they can help market existing ranching animals/product.
- Transportation – not enough options
- Logging – Decline in this industry really hurt us. We had mills, loggers, truckers. It was a huge blow when the government shut it down. One of the biggest losses
- The Copper Mine
- Job Center - We came close to having a important job center here. It didn't work. Not enough community backing. The job center would have focused on developing skills for jobs to have here, like oil and gas, tourism and forestry products. It got through the planning stages and then fell through. One question was, once they had the center, could they find jobs here? Other potential training could focus on how to operate a businesses and supporting recreational tourism. Home health care would be good business here.

**4. What are some of your most important historical benchmarks, that you can personally remember? Why are they important to you and the community? Have they been positive, neutral, or negative?**

- Locating new schools, hospitals and clinics in other town have impacted Cuba. We had far more clinics boosted in other communities and it is taking away from Cuba
- The High School in Pueblo Pintado did not have a huge impact on Cuba school population. What caused that is families moving away to find jobs. That is why school population is down.
- Road is a historical benchmark. Hwy 550 increased access and the number of people going through Cuba.
- Looking through old year books from the 50s and 60s we had all kinds of clubs and trained for skills rather than college. Not a lot of vocational skills offered. Vocational trainings went away. We graduated kids that didn't do anything.

**5. Has the presence or absence of a nearby town or small city had an impact on your community's health and wellness? Has a major highway or state road made an impact? If so, what are the impacts?**

- Roads have had an impact. Hwy 550 and added changes make the road safer.
- Building of 2 hospitals in Rio Rancho makes it easier. While we don't have specialty care here, it is only 70 miles rather than 90 miles.
  - With that [the hospitals] there are more options. However, we are no longer the facility of choice. They don't have to go to Cuba clinic, they can go to Bernalillo and do their shopping at the same time. Rio Rancho has reached its [size] limit because of BLM and Native American Land.
- If you have an emergency you used to be able to go to the clinic in Cuba. In the 1980s we had a hospital here.
- Economic future and well-being lies in the surrounding public land . Will be much more important in outdoor tourism.
- New Mexico Department of outdoor recreation is good. It is a "clean" thing. We can funnel people to healthy places.

**6. What is most important to you to help with community building as you move forward? Partnerships and supports?**

- We don't have meaningful planning. County and transportation program doesn't do planning. We don't have our own planner. They [urban areas] have a meaningful planning function that makes it happen. It brings infrastructure and jobs. We haven't had a comprehensive plan for 20-25 years. The county does not plan well for Cuba.
  - This can be a state issue.
- Placitas, Rio Rancho and Bernalillo are in the same county (Sandoval). When things are done by county, it really does affect the "CRUMBS" that end up here. If there is a little bit of money it will end up in bigger places. Most county commissioners come from those places.
- Kids moving away for jobs. What if we had good internet and have more home jobs. If someone can bring internet and promote distance work it would be huge. It would also help with education.
  - I work in call center with 2000 employees and most work from home.

- Improved transportation system. Some sort of bus systems. Pay a smaller amount than buying gas. Must be on a schedule that MAKES SENSE.
  - That's a planner thing. Council of Government (COG) does this but we are too far out here. Sandoval Co worked it out to pick-up and deliver teachers. It only works with certain jobs and schedules.
- "Step into Cuba" was going with full support. It brought all kinds of people to the table to make changes like sidewalks, trails, etc. We worked with the Forest Service and BLM. It's the most improvement and planning we saw in a long time.
- Land managers, BLM and forest service are key. They help with ranching, people who use wood, trails, etc.
- Continental divide has made a big difference and folks visiting here.
- County, State, academic partners (e.g. Prevention Resource Center) BLM are all important
- We need a financial partner. We have a cash flow problem. Financial partners are lacking.

#### **7. What sort of resources do you need, and how do you want to partner with others?**

- Money. Because you can plan, move forward, hire, etc.
- You have to have someone to organize and have structure. A planner.
- Incorporate more pipelines to get kids to stay here and younger people to do more.
  - Partnering up to keep kids here. Partner with ABQ businesses to teach trades and offer apprenticeships.
- Workforce development [to address the unique workforce needs of the area]
- Recruit businesses to come here. Economic Development. County has us in their sights and hasn't brought anything to fruition.
- Have to have things other than a job—you need a place to live.
  - In Gallinas there are 40 empty homes. Maybe sell them or have someone fix them up. Families will not give up the land.
  - They are going to have to have improved housing. Affordable housing. Remodeling and restructuring business to take a home and make it beautiful.
  - Schools can come in handy. There are a few handymen but they are getting older too.
- Lots of artists. Art should be right at the top. We have wonderful artists, jewelry. When tourists come to NM for arts, they don't think of Cuba.
  - A Place to showcase local artists and offer internships.
- We need a decent, nice hotel. Something that is beautiful and they want to stay. Have conference rooms and adequate parking. Nice giftshop "like Abiquiu Inn".
- Nice Air B & B and Raven's Roost. Build a resort. "It's a destination"

#### **8. How do you see your community 10 years from now?**

- "Same people sitting around the table"
- If changes don't happen the community will fail. The kids are coming back when they are older. It will be a community of old people.

- We are a very scenic spot with public land. Current ranchers have sold off to active retirees. We may see more of that. We are so close to West Mesa.
  - Not a place where a lot of retirees want to be.
- Silver City was built on artists and public land. They retire there because it is “cute”. Aztec the same. It is really cute because they have a plan.
- A culture in Cuba fights new things coming in. New ideas get squished. They just had a meeting for Dollar General. Dollar General may sue Cuba because they did everything they were asked to do and Cuba didn’t let them in. [They already have Family Dollar]
  - Culture may be if they like the rural community they like it. If folks want a city they should move to the city.
- Why can’t we be “cute”? Abandoned buildings falling down. Get the old buildings up to snuff. We need a planner. Individual families need to invest.
  - “Make Cuba Cute and Interesting”. Such a rich culture.
- Plan for tourism, active retirement, service industry for traffic, extractive industries, and local education to provide jobs. Planner to do all of that.
- Further conversation about behavioral health, mental health, drug use disorders. AMI struggled to hire because they couldn’t get folks to pass the background test.
- Generations behind us don’t have same work ethic. You hear over and over again, we can’t find good workers. It’s like someone saying “my grandson should be helping me load the hay but they are too busy on their phones..” Teens don’t have a clue on getting started. It is not just here, it is everywhere, including at the University.
- Many parents struggling to make ends meet. Single parent households and grandparents raising grandchildren.
- 50 acres was recently purchased to build a church retreat. When they have kids here, they may look at what can be done in Cuba so that kids have things to do.
- Youth Corps kids took so much pride in their work. “The best damn trail in the County” carved on log because they were so proud. These programs are so important. Take kids to schools like NM Tech in Socorro or a summer program in partnership with the Forest Service. Youth worked for 4 summers. Summer programs are great opportunities. Need someone to plan, get money, manage, etc.
- We need rural communities like Cuba to have a strong voice. We don’t have a pool around a cause that can go to the legislature and say “we need this!”. We need voices at the state, county and national level. People in the cities have no idea of what we are doing out here.

### **Case Studies Conclusion**

The qualitative findings in the two case studies attest to the rich cultural heritage and unique challenges faced by New Mexico’s small and remote communities. These isolated and underserved communities are slow to benefit from public and private resources. As one participant put it “When things are done by county, it really does affect the “CRUMBS” that end up here. If there is a little bit of money it will end up in bigger places. Most county commissioners come from those places”.

The case studies underscore the substantial multilevel barriers that stand in the way of improving community well-being. These include challenges associated with remoteness, including limited access to jobs, education and affordable housing; the difficulties of competing with urban areas for resources, services and qualified workers; economic vulnerability (boom and bust economies); and the scarcity of skilled professionals, including planners, healthcare workers, teachers. Additionally, both groups expressed concerns about supporting an aging population, mitigating the growing number of young families migrating to cities, and maintaining the community's rich cultural heritage. Finally, both communities recognize that their voice is diminishing at the county and state levels as increasingly more elected officials become disconnected from their communities.

However, we also found a number of promising trends and opportunities that point to continued improvement in these remote communities. Partnerships with private foundations, universities and health care providers have benefited both Abiquiu and Cuba. Successful examples include the Step Up Cuba initiative in Cuba and the University of California Berkeley Abiquiu Collaborative (BACA) program in Abiquiu. Both initiatives involve long-term relationships with universities and funders and promote the health and cultural heritage of the community.

The beautiful natural surroundings bring great potential for attracting outdoor enthusiasts and the possibility of serving as a "gateway" to these outdoor attractions. Better roads, cell phone service and broadband were all noted as having a significant and positive impact for residents, service providers, businesses and tourists.

At the same time, we emphasize the importance of recognizing that these remote communities carry a huge and inequitable burden when it comes to accessing or leveraging federal, state and county resources. Due to low population and isolation, remote communities typically lack access to expertise and skills, such as planning, financing and grant writing. Remote communities are highly dependent on (aging) volunteers for fire protection, emergency medical services, cultural events and social services.

The case study findings indicate, there is an urgent need to discover new ways to create and redistribute resources to benefit New Mexico's most remote communities. Ideas may include, but are not limited to:

- Increase investment in the Frontier Main Street program to provide capital in addition to technical assistance.
- Designate planners dedicated to frontier communities through the Council of Governments, Counties or other entities.
- Increase training and technical assistance opportunities so that remote communities can effectively plan, fund and implement needed programs and projects.

- Support partnerships between remote communities, universities, governmental entities and philanthropy.
- Designate a frontier ombudsperson within the New Mexico Legislative Council Service to monitor and collect impacts on frontier and remote communities. A central impartial, non-partisan office will allow agencies and organizations to report structural barriers affecting frontier and rural communities.
- Explore the option of developing an "Adjunct Agency" for rural and frontier initiatives. (See conclusion section below for more detail)
- Amend the Department of Finance and Administration's Community Planning to include unincorporated areas in addition to municipalities and counties. (See conclusion section below for more detail)

The National Center for Frontier Communities and its partners look forward to exploring these program and policy options with the legislature, state agencies, the Office of the Governor and others.

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### **III. How are Others Investing in Remote Communities?**

The third component of this study was to conduct a literature review to gain a better understanding of what other states, countries and entities are doing to support investment in frontier and remote communities. The literature search began with developing a context to better understand the main reasons for differences in economic performance and health and social outcomes across remote and frontier places in New Mexico and how policies can help to deliver positive outcomes and address these disparities.

The literature review began by assessing various definitions and characteristics of community well-being. Over a dozen different models were reviewed. The term “place-based approach” seemed to capture the essence of the VIDA initiative because it puts communities at the heart of activities. “Place-based approach” is also defined by: (a) partnership working across public and private sectors to provide services; (b) community-level actions, tailored to these areas and focused on prevention and early intervention; (c) viewing people as assets, and building on local assets more broadly; (d) partnership-driven, holistic working; and (e) a transition in the role of the public sector to the facilitation rather than delivery of services.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, place-based approaches typically include network development using both local and extra-local assets and networks, which was of interest to the VIDA project.

We were also interested in understanding how communities measure well-being. We found several community well-being models; of which all define well-being broadly and across several dimensions. Of particular interest was the [Better-Life-Initiative](#) developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This initiative was appealing because of its focus on policy applications of well-being; developing better data on well-being inequalities and exploring innovative methods for collection well-being statistics; and stimulating debate by reaching out and disseminating information to broad audiences.

The OECD well-being framework considers people’s living conditions and quality of life today (current well-being), as well as the resources that will help to sustain people’s well-being over time (natural, economic, human and social capital).<sup>3</sup> The framework has eight quality of life indicators that include: health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, subjective well-being; and three material condition indicators: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, and housing.

Both the place based approach and the well-being framework will be used to guide the future

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Atterton, J. (2017) Place-based policy approaches and Rural Scotland, Working Paper from RESAS Research Deliverable. Page 15-16. Available at [https://www.sruc.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/3808/342\\_placebased\\_policy\\_approaches\\_and\\_rural\\_scotland.pdf](https://www.sruc.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/3808/342_placebased_policy_approaches_and_rural_scotland.pdf) (Accessed 10th December 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Source: OECD (2017), How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-being, OECD Publishing, Paris, [https://doi.org/10.1787/how\\_life-2017-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2017-en)



work of the VIDA initiative towards its goal to facilitate equitable investment in frontier communities and to encourage the state of New Mexico to enact a bottom-up, micro-planning process for extending resources to the smallest and most isolated frontier communities.

The final piece of the literature review was to gain a better understanding of what policy initiatives other states, nations, and entities have adopted to facilitate or stimulate more equitable investment in frontier and remote communities. To this end, we found several interesting and innovative approaches which may be considered as we move forward with the VIDA work. Below is a partial list of potential policy approaches:

- Understanding the Anti-Donation Clause [NM]: A historical perspective. 2014  
[https://www.rodey.com/uploads/FileLinks/cff57958d69146eb9e548fa755102759/rodey\\_antidonationclausehistory.pdf](https://www.rodey.com/uploads/FileLinks/cff57958d69146eb9e548fa755102759/rodey_antidonationclausehistory.pdf)
- Community Associations. See the Alaska Nonprofit Community Association Handbook 2015  
<https://foundation.caionline.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/07/2015introduction.pdf>
- Dallas County Dept of Unincorporated Area Services  
<https://www.dallascounty.org/departments/duas/>
- Advancing Rural Broadband (prepared for NM Economic Rural Development Committee 8/14/2019) Source:  
[https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ERDT%20081419%20Item%203%20Rural%20Broadband%20\(3\).pdf](https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ERDT%20081419%20Item%203%20Rural%20Broadband%20(3).pdf)
- Disrupting a Foundation to Put Communities First in Colorado Philanthropy  
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1328&context=tfr>
- Promoting Place-Based Strategies to Address Poverty: Exploring the Governor's Role

The following examples come from the National Governors Association on exploring a Governor's role in promoting place-based strategies to address poverty<sup>4</sup>:

- Understanding the evolving roles and relationships of the institutional sectors involved in place-based efforts and promoting collaboration among them.
- Creating an environment that allows communities to determine workable strategies and provides leadership models and mentoring for the local players.
- Promoting collaboration across state agencies and helping to create shared measurement and performance monitoring systems.

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<sup>4</sup> Rood, S. and McGroder, S. Promoting Place-Based Strategies to Address Poverty: Exploring the Governor's Role. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, 2017.

- Applying flexible and strategic funding approaches as necessary, such as seed funding for pilot initiatives, glue money to fill funding gaps, short-term funding to scale up successful practices, longer-term funding for sustainable solutions and technical assistance around how best to braid and blend various funding streams.

Below are examples of how state legislatures changed policy to allow more authority and/or resources to nonprofit organizations serving remote and frontier communities<sup>5</sup>:

- California AB 2862: Overall, this bill amended the Credit Union Law and authorized a credit union to invest in charitable donation accounts (CDA). CDAs allow credit unions to fund charitable contributions through returns. The new law requires a credit union to distribute a minimum of 51 percent of a CDA's total return on assets over a five-year period to qualified charities.
- Connecticut HB 5442: Authorized nonprofit corporations to become a member of a worker cooperative. Worker cooperatives are business entities that are owned and managed by its own employees.
- Maryland SB 1045: This law requires that the grant or contract terms with a nonprofit organization receiving state funds allow for reimbursement of indirect costs. These indirect costs must be reimbursed at the rate that a nonprofit organization negotiated under a federal award; if a nonprofit did not negotiate a federal reimbursement rate, the state must reimburse these indirect costs at a rate of at least 10 percent. (Similar requirements were set at the federal level for indirect cost reimbursement in 2014.)

In New Mexico, there are several policy strategies to meet the VIDA goal. These may include but are not limited to:

- Increase investment in the Frontier Main Street program to provide capital in addition to technical assistance.
- Designate a frontier ombudsperson within the New Mexico Legislative Council Service to monitor and collect impacts on frontier and remote communities. A central impartial, non-partisan office will allow agencies and organizations to report structural barriers affecting frontier and rural communities.
- Adapt existing "Adjunct Agency" legislation. "Adjunct agencies" are those agencies, boards, commissions, offices or other instrumentalities of the executive branch, not assigned to the elected constitutional officers, which are excluded from any direct or administrative attachment to a department. An Adjunct Agency dedicated

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Gilmore, Savannah. A Glimpse into State Nonprofit Action. National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved 01/05/2020 from <https://www.ncsl.org/blog/2018/10/01/a-glimpse-into-state-nonprofit-action.aspx>

to rural and frontier New Mexico can retain policymaking and administrative autonomy separate from any other instrumentality of state government.

- Amend the Department of Finance and Administration’s Community Planning to include unincorporated areas. The Community Planning Section is under the Community Development Bureau and offers funding, training and technical assistance to New Mexico’s municipalities and counties in areas such as comprehensive planning, development, infrastructure financing, public participation, and strategic planning. The Community Planning Section could be amended to state “New Mexico municipalities, and counties, *and eligible\** unincorporated areas are encouraged by state law to complete a comprehensive plan to address issues such as land use, water, transportation, economic development, and infrastructure. The definition of eligible is still to be determined. For example, unincorporated areas might be deemed eligible if 3 or more elements of infrastructure are provided by community organizations and units of local government such as acequias and land grants. Infrastructure examples are MDWCA, Fire Department, EMS/Rescue Response, Acequia, Library, state certified charter school, community facilities, etc. Recommendations can be solicited from the VIDA Workgroup.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report provides a snapshot of available data, lived experience and policy options that are available to facilitate participatory planning and budgeting to assure that grassroots ideas and adequate capacity on the ground are considered in addressing local needs of remote and frontier communities in New Mexico. The National Center for Frontier Communities along with its partners and frontier communities will continue its efforts to facilitate equitable investment in frontier communities and inform policies that can make a positive difference in the lives and future of New Mexico’s frontier communities.