



EDD

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Outdoor Recreation Division has awarded first-ever grants aimed at growing the outdoor economy

SANTA FE, N.M. – The New Mexico Economic Development Department's Outdoor Recreation Division has awarded the first-ever grants to business start-up organizations aimed at growing the outdoor economy.

The awards of \$50,000 each will go to the San Juan College Enterprise Center in Farmington and to Creative Startups, which is proposing an initiative to serve as many as a dozen rural communities. Both were chosen for their regional focus to help outdoor recreation startups in the service, retail, and manufacturing spaces.

"My administration is clear that the outdoor recreation industry has incredible potential to grow and diversify New Mexico's economy," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. "Direct investment in local outdoor recreation businesses will jump-start their growth and expansion, creating jobs and supporting the industry as it further develops."

"These grants are the first step to assist small business owners and communities with the tools they need to open up and grow outdoor recreation businesses," added Cabinet Secretary Alicia J. Keyes of the Economic Development Department.

"The Outdoor Recreation Division is proud to support New Mexican entrepreneurs, first and foremost," said Outdoor Recreation Division Director Axie Navas. "They are the leaders and business professionals who have built our outdoor recreation economy, and their success means the state's success. Helping these small business owners thrive is a key outdoor-recreation priority of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham."

For San Juan College, the new grant program is an opportunity to expand on existing initiatives to diversify the Four Corners area economy by building an outdoor-friendly mecca for visitors.

The city of Farmington has already coined the phrase, "Nature's Playground/Nature's Proving Ground," but visitors often note the lack of guide services and other experiences such as river rafting and bicycle rides, which can optimize their stay in the area.

San Juan College has established a makerspace to help assist entrepreneurs with outdoor product manufacturing, called the Big Idea Innovation Accelerator. The state money will be used in tandem with that effort.

The funding “will build on The Big Idea Innovation Accelerator by supporting experience-based new businesses,” San Juan College wrote in its grant application. “This program will focus on helping to establish these businesses,” with grant dollars going to entrepreneurial curriculum, mentoring, marketing consulting, as well as office space rental for early stage businesses.

Creative Startups, a nonprofit organization founded in 2007, helped launch Meow Wolf in Santa Fe, and is one of the leading global and regional accelerators for creative entrepreneurs. It has organized accelerator programs in New Mexico, North Carolina, Baltimore and globally in Kuwait and Malaysia.

The organization’s proposal focuses on its established relationships with two dozen rural libraries around New Mexico and will expand to include workshops, mentoring, and an established accelerator curriculum that includes six modules on business organization and success.

“We expand resources and capacity in libraries by providing librarian training, purchasing equipment, and collections, and building connection between library staff and regional small business services. To date we have trained 62 entrepreneurs in 17 rural and tribal libraries,” according to the grant application from Creative Startups.

"We know all communities harbor creative and entrepreneurial talent that can translate into economic success," said Creative Startups CEO Alice Loy. "We're excited to work with New Mexico's Economic Development Department to launch Outdoor Recreation LABS in partnership with our State and public libraries. Our highly successful entrepreneurship programs identify talented entrepreneurs and help them turn their great ideas into thriving businesses. Given our state’s incredible outdoor recreation resources, targeting our programs to serve outdoor-oriented startups that promote our great state will allow us to build local economic success."

Gov. Lujan Grisham signed the bill to establish the Outdoor Recreation Division on April 2, making New Mexico the 13th state to establish a dedicated office for the outdoors.

Outdoor Recreation is one of the targeted sectors identified by the Governor to better diversify New Mexico’s economy. The Outdoor Recreation office is a division of the Economic Development Department.

The New Mexico Economic Development Department's mission is to enhance and leverage a competitive environment to create jobs, develop the tax base and provide incentives for business development.

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