

Artists in Business: A Creative Small Business Incubator

Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area

Rio Arriba County Recipient of Creative Economies NMEDD Grant

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Summary

In the winter of 2023, Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, a partner of the National Parks Service, was awarded the New Mexico Economic Development Department Creative Economies Grant Award for their proposed project “Artists Entrepreneurial Academy”. The Artists in Business Incubator that Northern Rio Grande National Heritage set forth to coordinate and implement stemmed from their mission of keeping northern New Mexico’s cultures connected to their heritage and giving communities a way to thrive economically by teaching themselves sustainable business models. Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area (NRGNHA) partnered with Rio Arriba County, Regional Development Corporation, Northern New Mexico College, and LOKA Creative to make the vision a reality. The course launch was delayed due to delay in release of funding due to state procurement policy issues. Upon resolution and to ensure proper planning time for partners and to ensure the largest impact for prospective students, the course will be made public through Northern New Mexico College Continuing Education course catalog for the Fall 2024 semester.

The Purpose

The purpose of the project was to foster an economic base of activity in the region by providing local artists with the skills and basic resources necessary to work and market their art in a sustainable and scalable way. NRGNHA stands as a dedicated steward and advocate for the rich tapestry of culture, heritage, language, and environment of Northern New Mexico. Their mission is to sustain the communities, heritages, languages, cultures, traditions, and environment of Northern New Mexico through partnerships, education, and interpretation. NRGNHA cites their mission as, “community and economic viability rooted in the heritage and environment of Northern New Mexico”. With this mission in mind, NRGNHA set forth to create a curriculum that would speak best to the citizens of Rio Arriba County and their specific needs.

According to Data USA, Rio Arriba County has a population of approximately 40,000 people of which nearly 22% live at or below the poverty rate (2022) . The largest concern for individuals residing in Rio Arriba County at this time are housing, food insecurity, behavioral health, transportation, and health inequity (*RACHC Factsheet 2024*). Bridge to Health NM states that nearly 32% of those in Rio Arriba County do not have enough food, 66% have trouble securing affordable housing, and 51% have trouble getting transportation (*RACHC Factsheet 2024*).

With these statistics and more, Rio Arriba County and the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area set out to reach and impact this underserved population by providing them with an opportunity to learn how to use their cultural influences and art skills to create thriving art business opportunities.

The Plan

Rio Arriba County contracted with NRGNHA with the understanding that they will look into the community to find partners who would be able to create a program that would have the biggest impact. Since Rio Arriba County has so many areas of opportunity, NRGNHA was able to partner with several organizations to create a successful project. These partners included the Regional Development Corporation, who served as the subject matter experts in curriculum creation, Northern New Mexico College, who hosted and promoted the class, and LOKA Creative, who also provided training and technical assistance to students and facilitated the marketing of the class. Rio Arriba County remains a partner and serves as the fiscal agent.

The team identified their audience: artists who had an interest in growing their business in a sustainable way in order to become more financially stable or independent. The team decided that a small cohort of 12 would be the best way to deliver information and allow the students to create bonds and learn together throughout this process. This program was meant, not only to be educational, but to build community within the cohort.

With this identified, the team began speaking with local artists about what they felt like they needed to learn most in order to build their businesses most effectively. Based on these interviews and conversations, NRGNHA and RDC came together to create a curriculum that they felt would be best suited for the proposed audience. It was determined that students were most interested in learning how to promote their work, but couldn't figure out how to create a website; they wanted to better understand the creation of a business model, but weren't sure where to start; they wanted to make sure they were reporting their income correctly, but the internet seemed to show conflicting information. LOKA Creative was brought in at this point to create collateral materials for students which included a website for each student, business cards, a

logo, and various social media platforms where students would be able to promote their work. RDC got to work on creating a curriculum that would teach students more about starting a business, taxes, time management, and more.

NRGNHA wanted to give students something that they would be able to use for the betterment of themselves and on their resumes to build up their employability as well. For this, they approached Northern New Mexico College and worked with them to create a program that would award students Continuing Education credit and a certificate of completion. This gave more credibility to the program and opened up more opportunities to reach more students.

The Impact

The class is set to begin at Northern New Mexico College on August 16, 2024 and will be held every Friday from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm for 7 weeks. NRGNHA hopes to have a total of 12 students enrolled in the class. Upon completion of the course, students will receive a certificate indicating that they have completed the program. Students will also receive a website that NRGNHA will host for a one year period, a logo, branding, business cards, and the knowledge of promoting themselves on social media platforms.

NRGNHA hopes this opportunity will bring more economic viability to the region through small-scale and grassroots efforts. By allowing students to learn in a non traditional space, students are allowed the opportunity to be honest, make mistakes, and learn from each other in a low stakes environment.

Conclusion

As of now, the class has not yet started. Classes are scheduled to begin in mid-August and end in late November. Upon completion, students will receive their certificate of completion, a developed website, and other business collateral.

NRGNHA has strategically involved partners who operate within Rio Arriba County, thereby injecting money into the local economy even before the project has officially begun. This initiative has resulted in three contracts for work within Rio Arriba County.

Despite facing setbacks related to funding and partner timing, NRGNHA remains dedicated to advancing for the betterment of the community they serve.

References

Rio Arriba County Bridge to Health. (2024). *RACHC Factsheet*. Espanola, NM; Rio Arriba Community Health Council.

Rio Arriba County, NM. Data USA. (2022). <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/rio-arriba-county-nm>