Printers at the second E3 event at UNM's Rainforest at Innovate ABQ

Entrepreneurship and Inclusion Development

YEAR ONE ASSUMPTION

Albuquerque suffers from a lack of economic diversity because federal and state government jobs have sheltered the region from the global economy and did not allow incentives for growth of the private sector.

YEAR ONE THEORY OF CHANGE

If we build on inherent entrepreneurial assets, create a culture of entrepreneurial energy using best practices, and use alternative means that enable historically marginalized people, families, and communities to participate in the entrepreneurial process, then more people will see becoming an entrepreneur as a viable option.

SIX YEAR OUTCOMES

Entrepreneurship Inclusion and Development

"Navigator" Concept Supported an Increase in the Number of Students and Entrepreneurs of Color

We drew from a public health model and applied a "navigator" concept to Albuquerque's entrepreneurial ecosystem. From programs that helped navigate entrepreneurs to business resources, to those aimed at supporting nontraditional students in accessing educational opportunities, to creating "collision" events that brought support organizations and entrepreneurs into the same room, City Alive planted seeds for programs that are helping people get better connected.

Aligned contributions

Molino and Color Theory	Albuquerque Community Foundation E3 Events	UNM Innovation Academy
Unite eight POC and women-led organizations to provide entrepreneurial support to Spanish-speaking, immigrant, and Native American communities.	**Bring together 150+ entrepreneurs,** entrepreneurial support organizations, funders, investors, and community members on a quarterly basis.	**Attracts a diverse student body:** Over 50% are people of color. Over 50% are women. Over 65% are first generation college students.

Digging Deeper

Innovative "collision" events created opportunities for students and the business community to interact, network, and collaborate on promising new ideas. Events like the Rainforest Pitch Competition, UNM Tech Navigator Challenge, and Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Expos (E3) events provided rich, welcoming environments for entrepreneurs and students to intersect with funders, nonprofit leaders, and local businesses looking for partnership.

The results of these events were impressive: the overwhelming majority of students who won the pitch competitions have gone on to create businesses that continue to produce revenue streams. The annual E3 events brought together the full breadth of Albuquerque's entrepreneurship diversity. Businesses owned by immigrants, Native Americans, refugees, and people of color garnered more customers, funders, and clientele, and simultaneously, the Albuquerque Community Foundation leveraged the opportunity to **collect data**, learning more about what kind of additional resources they need. This is an excellent way to understand the entrepreneur ecosystem and adapt to the evolving needs of the community.

Molino, originally conceived as a database of Albuquerque service providers, collected 56 different resources and organizations under its banner. Through data from community surveys, an urgent need emerged: low-income and traditionally marginalized entrepreneurs don't have enough access to resources. Molino and its partner Color Theory are now focused on building a shared ecosystem of support focused on serving Spanish-speaking, immigrant, and Native American communities. Their mission is to create a deeply interconnected service infrastructure to better connect existing services to communities of color.

Through the work of the UNM Rainforest, Innovation Academy, E3, and Molino/Color Theory, Albuquerque is better equipped to learn, understand, and respond to the needs of entrepreneurs, especially people of color. These events and provider networks allow for students and entrepreneur voices to be heard, and for the community to provide connections that assist them in achieving their entrepreneurial dreams.

RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS

The UNM Innovation Academy focused on recruiting first-generation college students through culturally sensitive messaging and framing. The program learned that using "entrepreneur" in outreach was ineffective and sometimes alienating. They changed their communication style to be more accessible and relevant, using calls to action such as: "Have you ever wanted to be on Shark Tank?" or "Have you ever wanted to start your own company/create your own product?" This tactic helped increase first-generation student applications across socioeconomic and racial strata.

> "As business owners of color [...] we are navigating systems not built by us. Our cultures and lived experiences do not always align with protocols and criteria established for accessing resources like capital loans and business networking, both necessary for growth and rarely inherent to our inner networks."

Annie Sanchez, Entrepreneur
Mariposa Strategies - [Read an article by Annie here](#)

Key Takeaways and Learnings

We learned **the root of entrepreneurship is connectivity.** Through the combined efforts to center diversity and inclusion, build talent pipelines and infrastructure, and increase capital access, Albuquerque was able to steadily build a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem by better connecting all its moving parts. One of our major achievements in this arena was cultivating a "navigator" concept, adapted from the public health sector. Navigator programs popped up across Albuquerque to help people find the support they need.

We learned that fostering a culture of entrepreneurial energy and inclusivity means **building welcoming spaces and events**. Top-down prescriptive solutions have not succeeded in Albuquerque, a place that deeply values community and trust. Instead, **tactics that were based in sincere relationship building and that created accessible and welcoming events were successful** in creating enduring connections.

The work to dismantle oppressive or exclusionary spaces for entrepreneurs of color is difficult and slow going. But the organizations on the front lines of this inclusivity work have proven that using **culturally-conscious approaches, building leadership from within communities of color, and listening deeply** has enabled more historically marginalized people, families, and communities to participate in the entrepreneurial process.
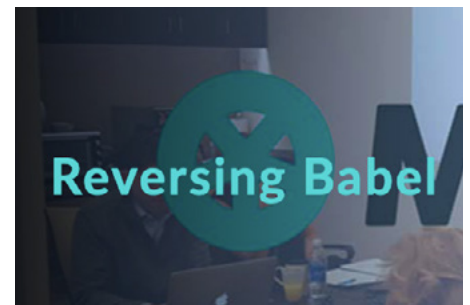
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