

# City Alive Case Studies



*Collective Impact Initiative Outcomes*

2014-2020





Hakim Bellamy - Albuquerque's First Poet Laureate and the creator of the name "City Alive"

## About City Alive

City Alive was a six-year collective impact initiative in Albuquerque, New Mexico that supported prosperity, equity, and economic justice across our beloved city. From 2014 to 2020, City Alive engaged over 100 nonprofit, business, and community leaders across dozens of organizations and institutions. All partners committed to City Alive's shared vision, putting equity and economic justice at the center of conversations, programs, and policy change.

City Alive was not about economic development as usual. It was where government and philanthropy and the business, education, and nonprofit sectors joined forces to grow our economy and overcome major economic hurdles together.

Through it, Albuquerque made significant progress. The City Alive initiative played a key role in accelerating our city's slow recovery from the 2008 recession and it embedded a pervasive culture of entrepreneurship and inclusion that will continue to play a transformational role in our city.



# Our Partners

City Alive's leadership was composed of volunteer organizations that committed to strengthening economic opportunity and building equity in Albuquerque's economy. City Alive also included a number of community partners who collaborated on specific initiatives in addition to the partners listed below.

Our deepest gratitude goes out to everyone who has supported City Alive over the years. The partners listed below established the strong foundation needed for Albuquerque to courageously meet an uncertain future and overcome challenges, setting us up for economic justice and equity work as we move our city and our economy forward.

## GOVERNMENT

Bernalillo County  
City of Albuquerque  
Sandia National Labs

## EDUCATION

Central New Mexico  
Community College  
Cultivating Coders  
Mission: Graduate  
Street Food Institute  
University of New Mexico

## FINANCIAL

Nusenda Credit Union  
Southwest Capital Bank  
Wells Fargo

## PHILANTHROPY

Albuquerque Community Foundation  
McCune Charitable Foundation  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

## PRIVATE SECTOR

App City Life  
Comcast New Mexico  
Fat Pipe and BioScience Center  
Technology Ventures Corporation

## COMMUNITY

ABQid  
Albuquerque Hispano  
Chamber of Commerce  
Innovate ABQ  
Native Realities  
Partnership for Community  
Action  
Roanhorse Consulting  
South Valley Economic  
Development Center  
WESST

WHERE WE  
STARTED IN  
2014

1 of 5  
cities selected  
nationally

- + Job creation
- + Economic mobility
- + Entrepreneurship
- + Economic engagement, diversity, and inclusion

Shared Vision:

Accelerating job creation and economic mobility through innovation and entrepreneurship to help our city reach its full potential as a desirable place to live, work, and prosper.



WHERE WE ENDED UP  
SIX YEARS LATER:

Accomplished our

10 YEAR BENCHMARKS IN JUST 6

Before the pandemic in December of 2019 the data showed that we had accomplished our collective 10 year benchmarks for success (in a mere six years): adding 10,000 jobs, reducing unemployment to pre-recession rates, and raising the median wages above \$934 per week.

\$33.5  
MILLION RAISED

by City Alive partners to support organizations, programs, and infrastructure to help close the gap in business ownership and leadership in Albuquerque with a focus on people of color.

200+

articles and videos

City Alive produced hundreds of stories about Albuquerque's entrepreneurial ecosystem, foregrounding narratives of entrepreneurs of color and the organizations that support them.

CITY ALIVE PARTNERS LOGGED OVER 6000+ VOLUNTEER HOURS.

100+ community partners

\$650,000+ IN LOANS to entrepreneurs through Co-op Capital

WON THREE MAJOR AWARDS



A Telly Award (widely considered the Oscars of TV) for our entrepreneurship video series.



The 2017 HUD Secretary's Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships



A top 25 Innovation in American Government award by Harvard's Ash Center on Democratic Governance and Innovation for the Co-op Capital program.

City Alive was featured in these publications:



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## About These Case Studies

These case studies share highlights from four of our key strategy areas: Capital Access, Business Development and Technology Commercialization, Talent and Skill Development, and Entrepreneurship and Inclusion Development.

These studies highlight the power and potential of collective impact to better support prosperity, equity, and economic justice. They also share key learnings, stumbling blocks, and opportunities for future impact.

Something as big as an economy doesn't change course with the effort of one organization or one leader alone. That's what collective impact is for.

Through these case studies, we aim to connect the dots and highlight the shifts in Albuquerque's economy over the last six years to embed more equity, opportunity, and local focus into economic development efforts and our entrepreneurial ecosystem as a whole.



Elizabeth Bibiano - Vegos  
Food Entrepreneur and Co-op Capital Loan Recipient

## Case Study One: Capital Access



### YEAR ONE ASSUMPTION

Entrepreneurship and innovation have been slow to develop in Albuquerque because New Mexico has few sources of capital and faces a philanthropic divide.



### YEAR ONE THEORY OF CHANGE

If we attract more dollars and improve availability of funds for start-up capital for entrepreneurs, then more of them will have the funding they need to launch/expand their business.

This means: growing traditional lending opportunities, increasing available capital and developing new, innovative models that tackle deeply entrenched and complex barriers.



Anzia Bennett - Three Sisters Kitchen  
Co-op Capital Partner



## SIX YEAR OUTCOMES

To put our theory of change into practice, City Alive piloted two programs: Nusenda's Co-op Capital program and Start Up, Stay Up, Scale Up (SU3).

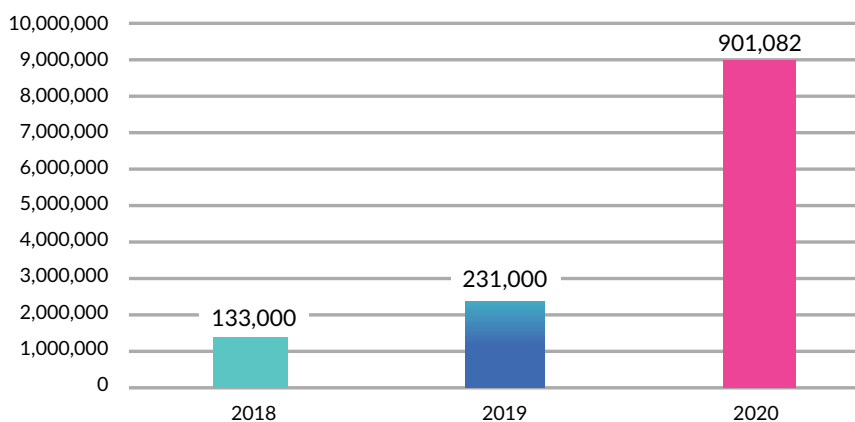
### Co-op Capital

#### Over \$1.25 Million Dollars in Low-interest Microloans

The Co-op Capital program has distributed over \$1.25 million in low-interest loans to low-income, minority, and women-owned businesses in New Mexico, with an average loan size of \$5,405.

Loans skyrocketed in 2020, the year that our solutions and accountability frameworks were fully tested and operational.

#### Co-Op Capital Total Loans Distributed by Year



### Start Up, Stay Up, Scale Up (SU3)

Developed a pilot program with a portfolio of 20 investable entrepreneurs of color.



## Digging Deeper

Through local and nationally commissioned studies,<sup>1</sup> we found that the need for more capital access – both in the form of loans and venture capital – was highly acute for entrepreneurs of color and low-income entrepreneurs. What's more, the lack of access to capital was hindering Albuquerque's overall economic growth.

A 2017 Small Business and Capital Landscape report by Next Street influenced our direction significantly. It reported that microenterprises (e.g., single-employee / owner-operated businesses) were at particular financial risk, often relying on personal finance such as friends and family, credit cards, personal loans, and payday loans to finance their business operations. Lenders in Albuquerque as a whole were found to be too conservative to effectively serve small business capital needs. And the high rate of the unbanked population in our city was also a major barrier keeping would-be entrepreneurs from getting started.

The Co-op Capital and SU3 programs took aim at overcoming those barriers. The Co-op Capital program increased available capital in Albuquerque's ecosystem by over \$2 million in funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, McCune Foundation, and Mayor's Prize for Entrepreneurship. In 2020, eight community organizations are actively distributing over one million dollars in loans, and loan repayment rates are higher than the industry average – 99 percent of borrowers pay off their loans on schedule.

The SU3 program developed a [portfolio of 20 entrepreneurs of color](#) to listen, learn, and adapt to better meet their needs. While we initially came in to address venture capital access, we found that professional services were also a major barrier. As a result, we developed Navigator to Acceleration, a program to strategically pair entrepreneurs of color with high-quality support services including business expertise, finance, legal, and marketing services, along with support in navigating venture funds and opportunities. We also partnered with Living Cities to release an ecosystem map, viewable [here](#).

## RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS

As of June 30, 2020:

- 95 percent of active Co-op Capital borrowers identify as people of color.
- 29 percent of borrowers in summer 2020 were on tribal land.
- 55 percent were Native American.
- Over half of this year's borrowers are parents of children ages zero to eight.
- Over 25 percent of loans went to immigrant entrepreneurs.

## POLICY CHANGE FOCUS

Nusenda redirected unclaimed funds (escheated funds) to support programs, including Co-op Capital, through an amendment to their bylaws. Many of these unclaimed funds have now served as collateral for Co-op Capital loans.

<sup>1</sup> Startup Genome [An Analysis of Six Early-Stage U.S. Ecosystems](#)



Alex Horton - International District Economic Development  
Co-op Capital Partner

## Key Takeaways and Learnings

Many people of color and historically marginalized populations have experiences that have made financial institutions feel unsafe; from racial profiling to encountering language barriers at the front desk. **The traditional banking system was not built with equity in mind.** To make progress toward an equitable and prosperous economy we needed to change the banking system, taking a **ground up approach.**

Knowing the barriers we faced, we went “**back to the basics,**” back to trust and relationship building. Co-op Capital is based on **relationships**, which opens up lending opportunities to populations that have not easily accessed traditional loans before. The program’s relationship-based lending approach has also resulted in a borrower repayment rate that is higher than industry average. Co-op Capital brings a sense of community that is unusual in banking transactions, resulting in a 99 percent repayment rate.

Additionally, this is not a singular service model. The Co-op Capital program provides **wraparound, connected support** along with capital access. It isn’t just, “here’s your loan and see you later.” Organizations maintain a long-term relationship over time with the borrower. That is what makes the model work.

**But building trust takes time. So does building credibility and relationships.** For Co-op Capital, it took over six years to build that momentum. Entering year six, loans more than tripled. That was the timeframe required to identify barriers and gaps, and then test solutions to make sure they actually work on the ground.



“I am so fortunate to have gone through the program with Street Food Institute and the funds that I received through [Nusenda’s] Co-op Capital. It wasn’t just looking at my name on a piece of paper, followed by a bunch of numbers. It was realizing and seeing me for the person that I am and just that passion that I had for my business.”

- Elizabeth Bibiano, Entrepreneur

Vegos, Co-op Capital loan recipient - [Watch her story here](#)

Another major takeaway that we’ve seen in New Mexico time and again: **replicating programs from other places doesn’t work.** Co-op Capital’s success demonstrates the power and possibilities for long-term, sustainable solutions through involving community. By keeping community organizations and entrepreneurs directly engaged, we ensure alignment between what we think they need and what they know to be their needs.

This work to increase access to capital will continue in Albuquerque. As we face significant economic challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we will continue reimagining capital systems, increasing access, and listening to the needs of our communities to ensure a stable economic future for families and communities in Albuquerque.

## More stories from Co-op Capital - Click to Read



[How Yadira Exited a Cycle of Debt](#)



[Credit Scores and The Status Quo](#)



[How Lilia and Silvia Beat the Banks](#)



Randy Asselin  
Tech entrepreneur in Albuquerque

## Business Development and Technology Commercialization



### YEAR ONE ASSUMPTION

Moving an invention from the lab to the marketplace is slow and daunting because the process to commercially exploit research varies widely.



### YEAR ONE THEORY OF CHANGE

If we facilitate/support technology commercialization (for example, licensing agreements setting up joint ventures and partnerships, spin-out, etc.), then there will be more start-up companies.

This means: bringing resources out from “behind the fence” and putting the community in more contact with lab and business development resources.



Lisa Abeyta - App City Life  
Leadership Partner of City Alive



## SIX YEAR OUTCOMES

### Tech Navigator

#### Improved Infrastructure and Stronger Relationships

In order to facilitate collaborative work, Albuquerque needed better infrastructure and stronger relationships to affect future outcomes. To do this, we piloted the Technology Navigator program to improve infrastructure and connectivity across sectors.

	Aligned contributions	
<p><b>Albuquerque Community Foundation</b></p>	<p><b>University of New Mexico</b></p>	<p><b>Sandia National Labs and Air Force Research Lab</b></p>
<p><b>\$600,000 granted</b> to nonprofit organizations that support entrepreneurs and high-growth companies through Mayor's Prize for Entrepreneurship.</p>	<p>UNM has ranked in top 100 universities worldwide in the volume of patents issued, and ranked 2nd in the nation for innovation impact for mid-sized universities.</p>	<p>Established offices out from "behind the fence" in places accessible to students, entrepreneurs, and the public.</p>

## Digging Deeper

In 2014, neither Sandia National Labs or the Air Force Research Lab had established offices out in the community. Today both Sandia and AFRL have thriving satellite technology transfer offices at the Innovate ABQ campus, co-located with UNM and CNM. This move brings students, entrepreneurs, and the public into more contact with the resources and minds from “behind the fence.”

City Alive helped galvanize the cross-sector partnerships that were forming in early 2013 between the research laboratories like Sandia National Labs and the University of New Mexico with local entrepreneurs and start-ups. In collaboration with Sandia National Labs and Los Alamos National Labs, UNM has already spun off twelve start-up companies from jointly owned technologies and generated over ten million dollars in revenue.

Additionally, Sandia National Labs was included among 14 of the world’s leading companies with programs and initiatives that are taking diversity and inclusion to a new level, [according to Diversity Journal](#). Sandia Labs earned the award for “Inclusive Leadership and Transformative Change” and is the only national laboratory recognized with the latest awards.

The public-private partnerships at Innovate ABQ expanded possibilities in Albuquerque’s downtown innovation district. The idea was to create a physical space where collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas would be easier and more synergistic.

## RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS

The Navajo Nation leased the top two floors of the UNM Rainforest building through an MOU with Innovate ABQ. The space offers dormitories for Navajo students, creating a culturally sustaining environment in the center of Albuquerque’s Innovation District.



“The latest tech is sitting on [Sandia Lab’s] shelves, and they need help bringing it to market [...] New Mexico has all the tools and resources right here in our backyard to transform our state, and set a new national leadership standard.”

– **Frederick Esters, Entrepreneur**

Estech Global - [Read more about Frederick here](#)





The seven-acre campus is still growing, and now houses offices for UNM Innovation Academy, Sandia National Labs, and the Air Force Research Lab (AFRL), along with CNM's FUSE Makerspace, and ABQid, a community funded accelerator program.

## POLICY CHANGE FOCUS

The Technology Gross Receipts Tax Credit began a three-year pilot program in March 2020. Companies that obtain a cooperative research and development agreement with Sandia and Los Alamos Labs will be able to apply for \$150,000 in technical assistance per year for procurement, prototyping, and testing. In turn, both laboratories will be able to claim tax credits against their gross receipts tax liabilities for their work with businesses. In total, the labs will be able to provide up to \$4.5 million in time, technical assistance and resources over three years.

# Key Takeaways and Learnings

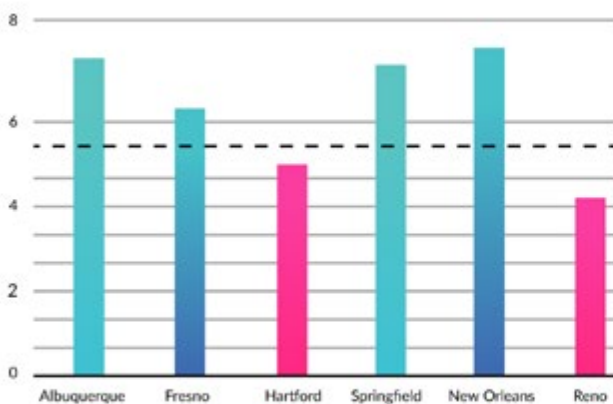
Collaborative spaces are key to creating environments that lay the groundwork for high-growth companies. Although New Mexico is home to three of the most prominent research labs in the nation (Los Alamos National Labs, Sandia National Laboratories, and the Air Force Research Lab), the technologies, discoveries, and resources have, until recently, been for the most part inaccessible to the public.

**Albuquerque needed to cultivate more so-called “collisions”** – where entrepreneurs, researchers, developers, and scientists organically “run into” each other, share conversations and insights, and build trust.

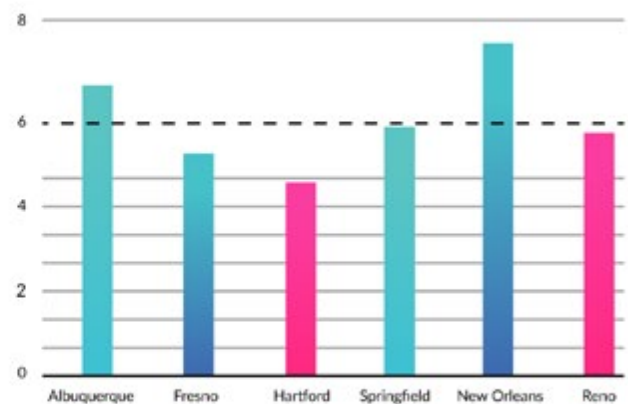
Albuquerque was a great testing ground for the hypothesis that if there were more opportunities for technology commercialization (e.g., licensing agreements, joint ventures, spin-out, etc.), it would lead to more start-up companies. UNM has ranked in the top 100 universities worldwide for the volume of patents issued, and ranked 2nd in the nation for innovation impact for mid-sized universities.

## Collisions build founder relationships and a strong sense of community in start-up ecosystems

Collisions with Local Start-up Community



Frequency of Local Start-up Events



We learned that **existing organizational relationships are key**. We couldn't just drop these tech transfer offices into an office space, and expect start-up businesses to find them on their own. Innovation districts need time to build: 1) trust between the partners, 2) awareness of the space in the entrepreneurial community, and 3) shared goals that promote collective progress.





We also learned that tech transfer, as an emerging field, lacks the education infrastructure needed to transition it from a buzzword into a career path. The UNM Innovation Academy has played a crucial role in making the logical next step: creating a new college track, degree program, or certification.

Racial equity and access continues to be a challenge in the technology sector. There is much work to do to bring in more entrepreneurs and students of color into this burgeoning career path (see Entrepreneurship and Inclusion case study for more).

## More stories from Tech Navigation (Click to Read)



[UNM's Partnership with the Air Force Research Lab](#)



[\\$20,000 in Prizes for Homegrown...](#)



[FUSE Makerspace](#)



Artisan - Etkie  
Local jeweler with international reach

## Talent and Skill Development



### YEAR ONE ASSUMPTION

Albuquerque has struggled with developing a talent pipeline because our many different subsets of populations need skill-up opportunities specific to their situations.



### YEAR ONE THEORY OF CHANGE

If we provide population-specific training to address this struggle, then more people will have the skills and resources to start a business or advance in/into a high-wage job.

This covers both traditional and nontraditional educational opportunities.



## SIX YEAR OUTCOMES

### Talent and Skill Development

#### Innovative New Pipelines to Careers and Education

Cross collaboration between Albuquerque's colleges, universities, incubators, and organizations supporting small businesses successfully created more opportunities and pathways to education and entrepreneurship for those who have been historically disadvantaged.

#### Aligned contributions

2+1+2 - UNM and CNM	UNM founded the Innovation Academy	Food Entrepreneurship	CNM Ingenuity scales up access
<p>This program fast tracks students to earn three degrees in five years, saving residents on average \$23,600 in tuition and fees.</p>	<p>950+ students. 54 student companies in operation.  <b>Over \$400,000 awarded to student businesses</b> through the Tech Navigator Challenge. 91 percent of these companies are still in business.</p>	<p>The Street Food Institute, a nonprofit food entrepreneurship organization, has trained over 250 potential food entrepreneurs. 65% are people of color and 49% have annual household incomes under \$19,000 per year.</p>	<p>Through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, CNM now provides holistic support for students in skills programs, including support for childcare, transportation, and tuition.</p>

## Digging Deeper

Talent and skill development in both traditional and nontraditional tracks are critical investments in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. To expand economic opportunities and promote racial and income equity we need to not only align skill development with current and future employment opportunities, we also need to pair those opportunities with holistic support that will help people succeed despite complex life circumstances.

Over the last six years, a lot in Albuquerque's talent and skill development landscape has changed. The role of City Alive in this arena was predominantly sharing what worked and often connecting partners and efforts to each other and to funding in ways that would help programs grow and succeed.

### Shining a light on some of the great work that has happened:

UNM launched the Innovation Academy, a metacurricular program designed to be the University of New Mexico's (UNM) incubator for ideas, businesses, and people. The innovationAcademy began with 14 student-run companies in 2016 and has grown to 54 in 2019. As of January 2020, 91% of their pitch competition participants were still in businesses. Not only are the student entrepreneurs highly successful during and after their coursework, the student body is also impressively diverse: over 50% people of color, more than 50% women, and over 65% first-generation college students.

CNM and UNM launched their 2+1+2 program, which makes getting a master's degree faster and more affordable, saving residents on average \$23,600 in tuition and fees.

## RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS

UNM's new Innovation Academy has enrolled 950+ diverse students. Over 50 percent are female, over 50 percent are people of color, and over 65 percent are first generation college students.



"The 2+1+2 Program between CNM and UNM is a wonderful illustration, frankly, of what [City Alive] is about [...] We've created a pathway between the two institutions that makes it very easy for students to enter either CNM or UNM and then work their way up."

- **Debbie Johnson**, former Director of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

CNM - [Learn more about the 2+1+2 program here](#)



Over the last five years, CNM has launched various initiatives related to technology, workforce development, and entrepreneurship. From becoming one of the first community colleges in the country to offer computer coding bootcamps, to the FUSE Makerspace making million dollar machines accessible to students and entrepreneurs alike, to a merger with ABQid to help New Mexico start-ups thrive, CNM has helped Albuquerque's entrepreneurial ecosystem and job opportunities expand in significant ways.

For example, graduates of CNM's Deep Dive Coding, a 10-week, 40 hours-a-week bootcamp program, are securing jobs with an average starting salary of \$49,000. Since 2014, enrollment has increased over 300% and over 60% of students are people of color. Through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, CNM offers Deep Dive Coding Bootcamp students financial support for childcare and transportation, and subsidizes internship opportunities at local companies to build their resumes and connections.

Another City Alive partner, the Street Food Institute, a nonprofit food entrepreneurship organization, has trained over 250 potential food entrepreneurs. 65% are people of color and 49% have a household income less than \$19,000. Their graduates have started 21 businesses (food trucks, catering companies, bakeries, small restaurants and cafes) and through Co-op Capital, Street Food Institute has begun to offer micro-loans to local food entrepreneurs to help build their businesses.



“We don't have enough time to cover all of the challenges I have faced as a Latina and nontraditional student [...] Life has gotten in the way when I had bills to pay and family obligations. Having been married and divorced, having survived domestic violence and a major motorcycle accident [...] But through the Innovation Academy at UNM Rainforest, STC.UNM and the Clinical and Translational Science Center at UNM Health Sciences Center, I have been able to connect with mentors who have helped me to grow.”

– Mercedes Ortega-Kennedy, UNM Graduate and Entrepreneur  
My Money My Future - [Read more about Mercedes here](#)



# Key Takeaways and Learnings

We knew that as a whole, we needed to do a better job of connecting people with opportunities to prepare for careers in our local economy. That meant reducing red tape, removing hurdles, and providing better wraparound support.

It might sound straightforward, but connecting people with career development opportunities is by no means simple. Making educational and skills development opportunities accessible isn't just about lowering the costs or offering flexible schedules for parents and those who work. It was about **changing systems so they work for real people**, which requires deep listening to the community, a holistic approach, and change at the institutional level.

We perhaps underestimated just how long it takes to change talent and skill development systems in Albuquerque. As a collective through City Alive, progress stalled at times as we got entangled in understanding each others' competing priorities. **Getting on the same page often ate into our time to take action.**

Originally, City Alive maintained a workgroup focused on Talent and Skill Development. It brought large institutions into conversation with community based nonprofits to develop solutions and opportunities in both traditional and nontraditional tracks. But by year four, we dissolved this workgroup, recognizing that **talent and skill development plays a role in every economic development and inclusion activity.**

## More stories from Talent and Skill Development (Click to Read)



[Talent and Skill Development](#)



[Credit Scores and The Street Food Institute](#)



[PBS Newshour says...](#)



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
<p>Unite eight POC and women-led organizations to provide entrepreneurial support to Spanish-speaking, immigrant, and Native American communities.</p>	<p>Bring together 150+ entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial support organizations, funders, investors, and community members on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>Attracts a diverse student body:            Over 50% are people of color.            Over 50% are women.            Over 65% are first generation college students.</p>



## 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.

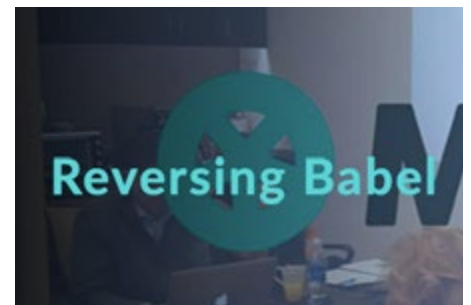
## More stories from Entrepreneurship and Inclusion (Click to Read)



[Albuquerque Named Top 10 City for Women in Tech](#)



[“Built For Us, By Us”](#)



[Reversing Babel](#)



Gabe Sanchez - Latino Decisions  
Racial Equity Panel for Living Cities, 2017

## Challenges

The timeframe to see progress was one of our biggest stumbling blocks. Collective impact is not easy or speedy. The adage “if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together” certainly applied to the City Alive experience. We’d add, “... and if you want to go far together, make sure to keep your head up.” We found that keeping moral and engagement high was challenging, and not always achievable.

Another challenge that came with an extended timeframe was that there were significant changes in Albuquerque over the years. From economic realities, to changing partnerships, to a new administration at the City of Albuquerque, every few years our approaches had to be reimaged to respond and adapt to changing political, economic, and social conditions.

As a volunteer initiative, all of City Alive’s partners engaged outside of their nine-to-five duties. While collectively leaders gave an astounding 6,000 volunteer hours over the six years, we still faced a scarcity of time and energy to push programs forward. A few promising efforts didn’t quite reach their critical mass as a result.

Lastly, as an initiative with a non-local primary funder, we struggled with meeting funder expectations while doing what was most relevant for our communities. There is a great benefit to having national partners, and we recognized that the true needs of our city didn’t always align with their priorities.



## Conclusion

Over the course of six short years, Albuquerque has experienced a seismic shift in its systems-level thinking. Alongside countless dedicated and passionate partners, City Alive played an active role in redistributing wealth, breaking barriers to entry, and democratizing access to entrepreneurial resources. With a diligent focus on businesses owned by people of color, women, and other historically marginalized groups, City Alive has supported a measurable increase in diversity and inclusion in Albuquerque's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The number of entrepreneurs and students who were historically locked out of the system have new doors open in Albuquerque to pursue the careers of their dreams.

The work of lifting up entrepreneurs of color and dismantling oppressive systems takes patience, steadfastness, and regular self-interrogation as organizations and as leaders. As a collective impact initiative, City Alive was committed to staying agile, adaptive, and responsive to the evolving needs of the Albuquerque ecosystem. Along the way the leadership table courageously restructured, reevaluated key goals and metrics, and faced questions of accountability and representation in our ranks. We believe that this made us stronger, bolder, and more connected to our mission.

Although the City Alive initiative has come to a close, we have full faith in the ongoing work of our partner institutions. This work has established collective goals and aligned contributions that are advancing a prosperous and equitable Albuquerque for all.

