

Grants aim to help underserved youth in rural New Mexico

By Adrian Gomez / Journal Arts and Entertainment Editor

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Roger Montoya, left, artistic director and co-founder, and Salvador Ruiz-Esquivel, executive director and co-founder of Moving Arts Española, stand in their facility on Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo in Nov. 2019. Moving Arts Española is one of four organizations that is awarded a grant by the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation. (Eddie Moore/Albuquerque Journal)

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Living in rural New Mexico, students can be far removed from the arts.

This is why the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation is stepping in to be the bridge and helping New Mexico organizations reach rural students.

The foundation created the Thoma Equity Grants, which builds partnerships that improve the lives of young people in rural and under-resourced areas of New Mexico.

Through the grant, organizations are able to push forward the arts, education and community to inspire the next generation of leaders.

The Thoma Equity Grant supports rural youth, art-focused community programming, and education.

“The Thoma Equity Grant funds programs that will increase opportunities for youth and young adults in rural areas of New Mexico,” said Nicole Danti, PR and communications manager at the Thoma Foundation. “Offering access

to career education in these underserved areas becomes an investment in an entire community.”

In fall 2020, the foundation started conversations with educators, government officials and nonprofits in New Mexico to learn about the needs of young people throughout the state.

“From that point, we sought out different nonprofits that we were interested in and weighed if their needs met our goals,” Danti said. “Carl and Marilyn are strong supporters of education and they know the challenges of geographic isolation. They understand and support that.”

The foundation then partnered with four nonprofit organizations to support pilot programs and enhanced engagement at each organization. The Equity Grant partners represent diverse communities and strategic initiatives sharing a passion for advancing equity and creating pathways to opportunity in New Mexico.

The Thoma Equity Grants funded \$555,000 in programs throughout New Mexico in 2020, in partnership with the New Mexico nonprofits:

- Moving Arts Española received grant support to design and build out a space in the former Ohkay Owingeh casino, allowing expanded access to digital arts and media education for youth and young adults.
- High Plains Regional Education Cooperative and NS4ed serve northeastern New Mexico, and received the grant to implement a virtual series in eight school systems for counselors and teachers on Social-Emotional Learning, as well as professional development for teachers in up to 20 schools to implement NS4ed’s career-focused math curriculum.
- Creative Startups is partnering to pilot a Native American Entrepreneurship Portal. It will develop and implement learning resources, peer networks, mentorship and support of Native American entrepreneurs with support through Equity Grant funding.
- CNM Ingenuity received the grant to provide 16 full scholarships, including a laptop and materials, for a 15-week UX/UI coding Deep Dive for rural New Mexican young adults starting in August.

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