



**RCAC**

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## Water Leadership Program

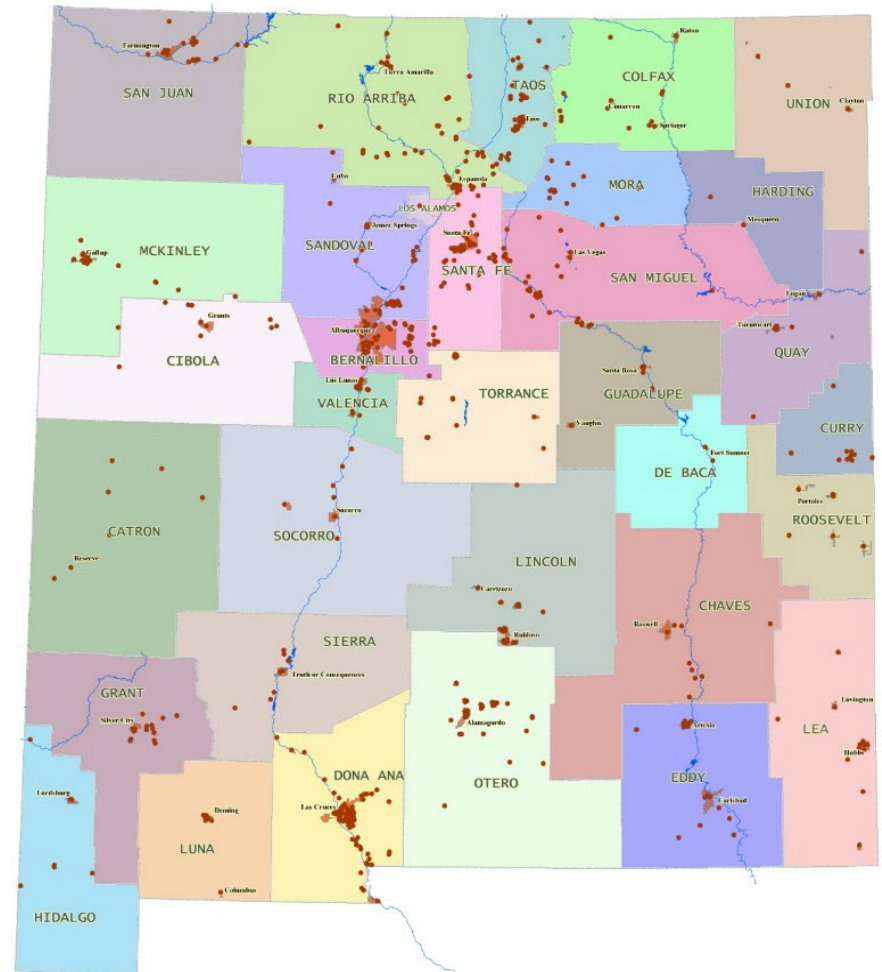
### The Water Leadership Institute

Focused on rural communities to connect leaders to one another and to regional resources

Blanca Amador Surgeon,  
Rural Community Assistance

# Water Systems in New Mexico

4%	27 w/ 3000+ connections
2%	15 w/ 2000-3000 connections
4%	25 w/ 1000-2000 connections
6%	40 w/ 500-1000 connections
84%	500+ w/ <500 connections
100%	<u>96% of NM Drinking Water Systems serve less than 3,000 connections</u>



# The Challenge

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Small Systems were not formed for the management and operations **realities of today**:

- Project development, infrastructure costs, emerging contaminants, emergency planning, workforce accrediting, technology advances etc.
- The potential volunteers to the board who may work 2-3 jobs and commute outside of the community.
- An annual operating budget that limits the ability to pay and retain workers even if they find them.

# We Need to Produce New Models

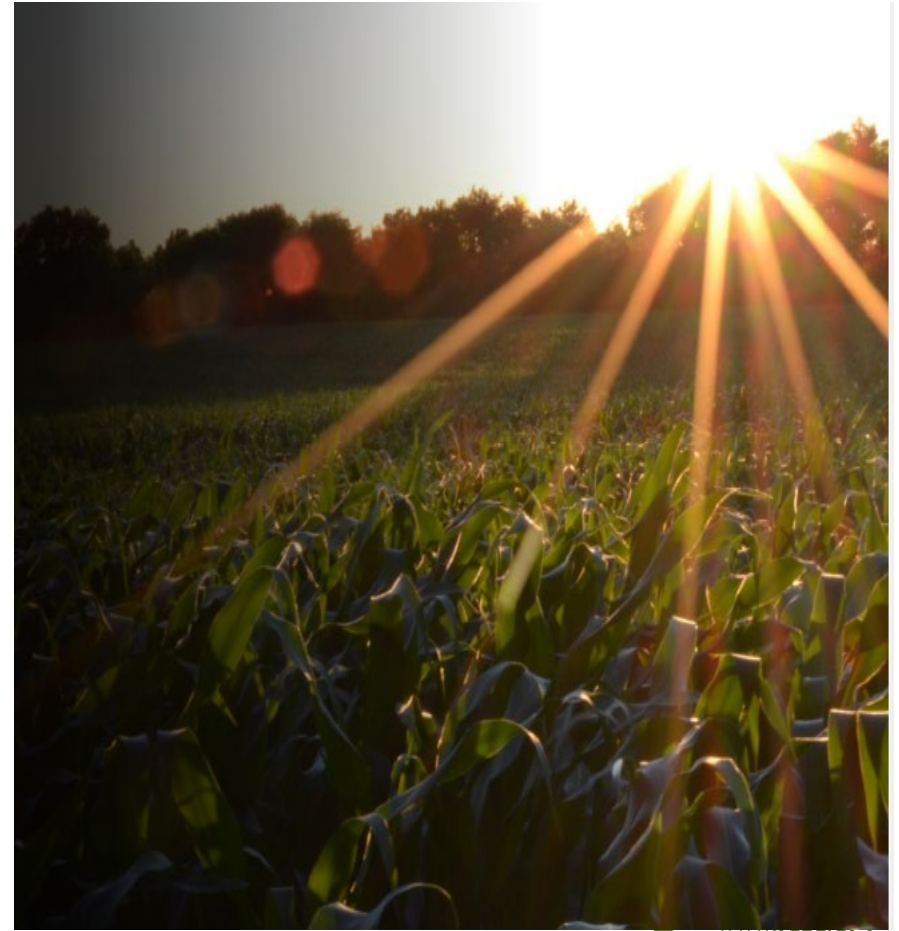
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Our Approach:

- Bring people close to the problem to solve the problem.
- Build trust and connections among communities.

The Water Leadership Institute is born.

The curriculum was developed in partnership with Western New Mexico University.



# The Water Leadership Institute

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- Connects board leaders across rural communities within a geographic region.
- Addresses the barriers to working together: fear, lack trust, lack of knowing the other, emotional attachment to the system and/or to the community etc.
- Provides Training and Information – we invite speakers

# Some Logistics

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5 in person all day workshops – held once a month



We partner with counties, universities, schools and community centers to use their location.



Funded by NMED, TF, NMFA and our national office Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)



Sponsors: fund meals provided and a stipend

# 2024 -2025 Locations: Chamita and Tierra Amarilla, Cuba, Las Cruces, Albuquerque

## Water Leadership Institute

Fall 2025 - Total project outcomes

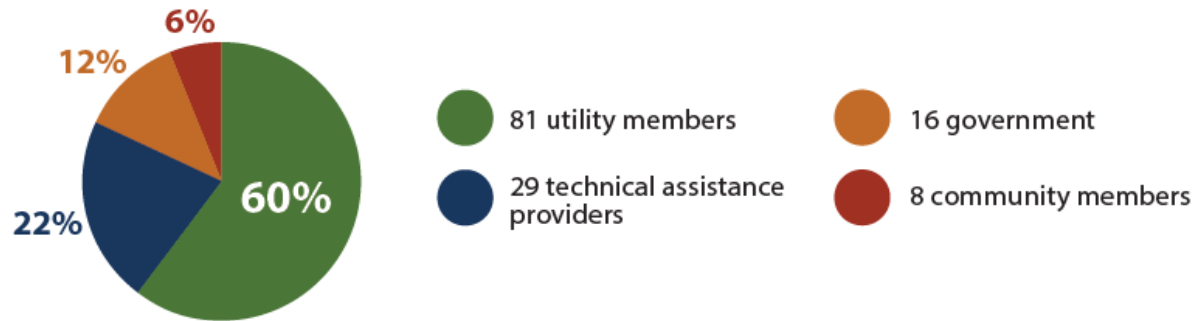
### Overview

**19 workshops**

**81 graduates**

**41 utilities**

### Attendees by organization type



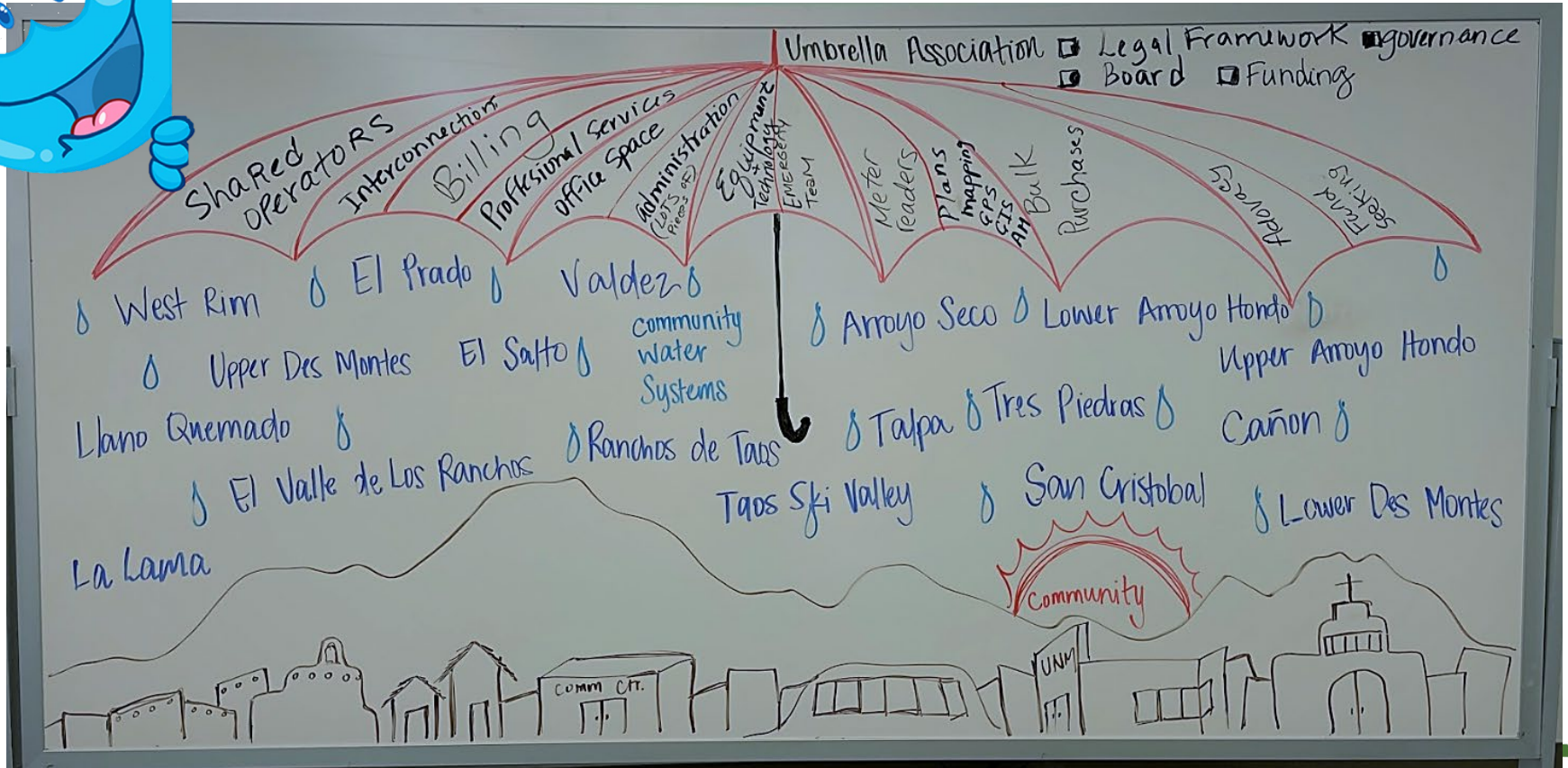
# Outcomes

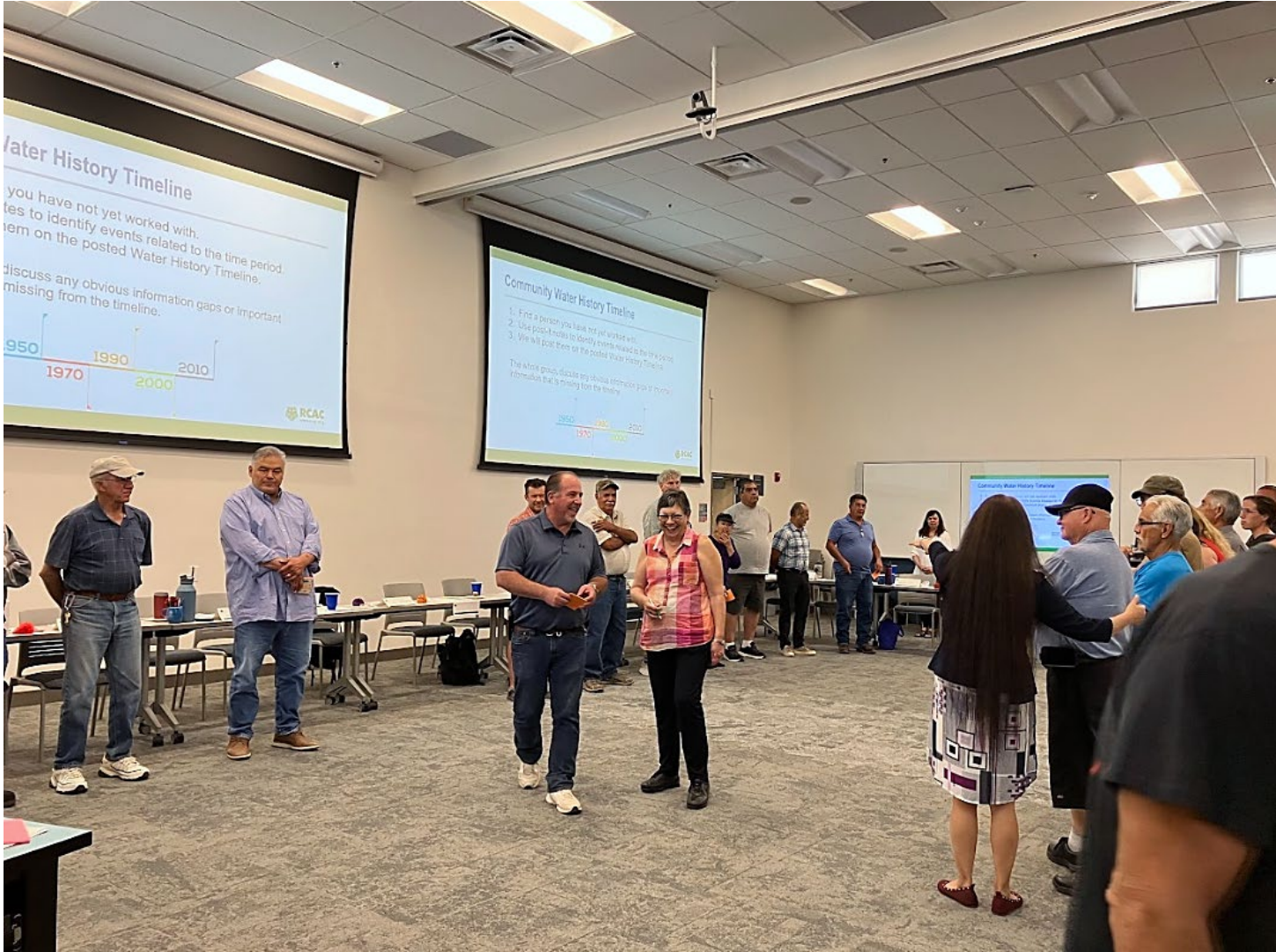
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- a) Two Regional Water System Resiliency Act Entities – the first and second in the state.
- b) 1 is very close to being formed
- c) 3 are exploring a partnership.
- d) 3 of the regions continue to come together for training. They asks us to bring them together.



# Regional Collaboration Options





# 2026 WLIs Current and Planned

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- Santa Fe County – ongoing
- Upcoming
  - Sandoval County
  - Mora County
  - Lincoln County
  - Grant County

Contact me: Blanca Surgeon at [blanca.surgeon@rcac.org](mailto:blanca.surgeon@rcac.org) or at 505 577 6917 for more information!