

Navajo Nation navigates New Mexico's capital outlay process

Written by Staff Reports

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OPVP and DCD host first N.M. tribal infrastructure and capital outlay summit

ALBUQUERQUE — The Office of the President and the Division of Community Development hosted the first New Mexico Tribal Infrastructure and Capital Outlay Projects Process and Update Review Summit for 54 New Mexico chapters Nov. 1-2.

“Economic reports predict that New Mexico could have a \$2 billion budget surplus, in part because of oil production in the Four Corners region,” President Russell Begaye said. “This provides an opportunity for all New Mexico chapters. We are working to gain full authority over our natural resources, but in the meantime, we have to be strategic and work with the state’s capital outlay process to obtain funding for infrastructure.”

Each of the 54 Navajo chapters in New Mexico identifies and ranks five infrastructure projects in its Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan.

State legislatures and the governor review the plans and determine which projects to fund using money from severance tax bonds sales, oil and gas revenues, and geo-bond sales. At any given time, up to three capital outlay projects may receive funding per chapter.

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At the summit, DCD Division Director Carl Smith spoke about the importance of his division's Capital Management Project Department and of the event to navigate infrastructure projects through the capital outlay process.

"This summit is an opportunity to get involved," Smith said. "That way you know what the staff are doing at your chapter. What does it mean for state funding? What are the restrictions? What needs to be done to spend this money? This summit is to help you answer those questions, to be ready, to be prepared for your community members, for your elders."

Mark Freeland, an executive staff assistant for the Office of the President, was assigned for the past several years to work directly with chapters in New Mexico to help ensure that proper paperwork is submitted for land withdrawals, environmental clearances, archeological clearances, right-of-ways, Scope of Works, Notice of Obligations and more.

When a chapter project receives capital outlay funding from the state, the Navajo Nation pays the costs upfront using the general fund. Then the tribe submits a request for payment to the state for reimbursement.

However, funding could be reverted back to the state if certain requirements are not met, such as the timeline to expend at least 5 percent of a project's funding within six months after the money becomes available.

"The Navajo Nation has completed 122 infrastructure projects in the last four years," Freeland said. "Commitment, collaboration and communication for the benefit of our Navajo people,' That's the theme of the summit because that's what we strive for. Everything that we do is for the benefit of our Navajo people."

In 2015, three capital outlay projects were completed. In 2016, 39 projects were completed. In 2017, 80 projects were completed. These include the Tohajiilee Emergency Medical Services Center, Torreon Senior Citizens Center, Tse'li'Ahi Senior Citizens Center, White Horse Lake Senior Citizens Center, bathroom additions for Lake Valley Chapter, a sewer lagoon for Red Rock Chapter and many more projects.

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Newcomb Chapter President David Randolph shared some of his chapter's success with the capital outlay process to build a parking lot, renovate the senior center, and purchase a backhoe, tractor and five-ton truck to use for community-based needs. The chapter is working on a helipad for medical air transport, a water hauling station, and improvements for a roadway with a boxed culvert.

Naschitti Community Governance seeks funding for a new warehouse, waterline extensions, and road improvements, according to its Commissioner President Randy Roberts.

At the conference, representatives from Navajo Nation Division of Transportation, Department of Justice, Office of the Controller, Office of Management and Budget, Division of Natural Resources, CPMD and OPVP gave presentations.

"This is a shared partnership with OPVP and CPMD in working together to elevate the learning process for all New Mexico chapters to be strategically positioned to receive funding," Sherylene Yazzie, department manager for CPMD, said. "We're extremely excited because, in a couple of years, we've established opportunities to help chapters understand the complicated process, know their needs and teach them planning."

Yazzie said one of the goals of the department is strengthening government at the local level by giving officials at the chapter the ability to determine what projects are funded, including cellular towers, earthen dams, windmills, solar systems, power lines, renovations for chapter houses and more.

More information about capital outlay projects, including digital copies of the presentations at the summit, can be found online at www.cpmd.nndcd.org .

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