

Four Corners Future Forum: Expanding the Partnership

Written by By Jeff Kiely Executive Director, NWNMCOG
Friday, 15 June 2018 07:10



The Four Corners region is recognized internationally for its cultural, geographic, archeological and iconic places and images. Yet the people of the Four Corners are often divided by jurisdictional and bureaucratic lines, political divides, and cultural misconceptions. The economy of the Four Corners - no matter what tribe or pueblo, or State, or region is considered - is facing an economic crisis.

Our base industries that have supported our governmental coffers are changing, disappearing, and in some cases headed to extinction. The word “diversification” comes to the forefront, along with “think regionally/act locally” – connecting our local efforts to regional action and a united voice for future generations.

More than 140 people from Southwest Colorado, Northwest New Mexico, Southeast Utah and Northeast Arizona, including several tribal officials, participated in the 4 Corners Future Forum held in November 2017 to kick off efforts to create an interstate economic alliance, and 70 of those participants signed on as volunteer partners to move that regional work forward. Many of this cohort, along with leaders from the region’s councils of governments and economic development organizations, came together in Durango in early April for follow-up workshops to continue the Forum momentum, strengthen working relationships and flesh out some of the cooperative strategies and priority actions identified at the November Forum.

Public meetings in each of the four quadrants of the Four Corners, including the tribal nations,

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are planned for economic development leaders in the coming months to expand the conversation with citizens in our 4 Corners communities, reaching out to gather input and insight on issues and opportunities important to the people of our communities.

According to Arvin Trujillo, co-chair of the Four Corners Future Forum and Government Relations Manager for Four Corners Power Plant: “The goal of the road shows in all the states and the tribal regions is to find out from the public what they want in economic development in the region. We want to know what their concerns are, what their needs are, what their expectations are.”

Forum participants were inspired by the excellent input provided at the 4 Corners Future Forum by Minnesota’s Region 5 Development Commission Executive Director Cheryal Lee Hills and her regional partner Arlene Jones of the Sprout Market. In follow-up to Cheryal Lee’s and Arlene’s participation in the Forum, in February several members of our Forum committee made the trip to Minnesota and met dozens of citizen-leaders in their “Resilient Regions” initiative.

Melissa Meechan, Four Corners POWER Initiative project director with the office of the President at San Juan College, reported on her take-away from the Minnesota trip by emphasizing the need to reach beyond economic officials and business leaders. “We realized we were going to need more community input,” she said, “not just for more ideas, but to engage people’s participation and leadership in a sustained effort to transform the economy.”

The public meetings and further strategizing will lead up to “Four Corners Future Forum 2.0,” to be held in Fall 2018 in conjunction with the “Regional Economic Diversification Summit” proposed by the Austin Regional Office of the US Economic Development Administration. The focus here will not be on Federal and State agencies coming to tell how their programs can help, but on us Four Corners stakeholders showcasing our assets, projects, and initiatives for investment and partnership.

As National Geographic Magazine acknowledged a few years ago when investing in the Four Corners Geotourism Mapping Guide initiative – one of only 17 such designations on the planet - the Four Corners region is a delightfully unique place, populated by a diverse amalgamation of creative, resilient and independent people with a “can-do” attitude. That is a big reason for why we will succeed in forging a prosperous future.

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Now it's time for us to enter the "shark tank" to start making the case, selling our region, and bringing in the investors. If you've got "investable projects" ready for the show, let us know! And stay alert for announcements and updates on the Four Corners Regional Consortium initiative. Divided ... we will fall by the wayside. Together ... we can lift up our voice to the world and build our economy of the future.

By Jeff Kiely

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