



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Chapters in New Mexico receive “Best Planning Project” award for sound planning and teamwork

Projects displayed exceptional innovative solutions

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The 54 chapters on the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation were recognized as the “Best Planning Project” by the New Mexico Environmental Department at the 13th Annual New Mexico Infrastructure Finance Conference.

A total of six awards were given to entities throughout the state. The purpose of the awards was to highlight projects with exceptional innovative solutions and projects which encouraged community wide participation.

The Navajo Nation was recognized because every chapter on the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation is part of the state’s Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP). At the state’s executive level, the plan can determine whether any capital improvement projects are funded.

Most recently, the state’s Capital Outlay Division used the ICIP to inform Gov. Bill Richardson and the Legislature of community priorities. In the last few years the Governor’s Office has reviewed projects submitted in the ICIP when considering the merits of capital outlay bills.

“It creates a plan for the community and creates funding opportunities,” said Denise Copeland, principal archaeologist with the Navajo Nation who was recognized along with 54 chapter representatives. Six years ago, the only chapter which was under the ICIP was Ramah Chapter. Today, Copeland works closely with all 54 chapters to ensure they complete their ICIP.

“None of us could have done it without each other,” said Copeland, who said teamwork coordinated among chapter officials is crucial for the ICIP. A representative from each chapter was invited to the awards ceremony and each chapter was recognized.

Copeland helps to manage a website dedicated to helping chapters create capital improvement plans for getting funds. The website, <http://www.wind.enavajo.org>, provides a central hub zone for information from the Navajo Nation ICIP, budget, profiles, mapping and chapter images.



Denise Copeland, principal archeologist, holds a plaque and waits as representatives from each of New Mexico’s 54 Navajo Chapters make their way to the front of the room to be recognized on Oct. 29, 2008, at the 13th Annual Infrastructure Awards Ceremony in Albuquerque, N.M. (Photo by Natasha Johnson)

Today, Navajo communities are now becoming more aware of the benefits of sound planning.

"It helps the chapters get the information to the state," Copeland said. "This is to try to help get a capital improvement plan for the entire Nation."

At the community level, infrastructure planning fosters agreements and gives direction to an entity's future. This plan prepares the way for efficient development with community support.

With each chapter under the ICIP, chapters have dramatically improved their chances of being selected for capital outlay funds from the state of New Mexico. Using the ICIP as a planning tool, the 54 combined chapters were able to secure more than \$12 million dollars in capital outlay funds this past fiscal year. Under the plan, the Crystal Chapter was able to secure the largest amount for capital outlay with a total amount of \$2.8 million.

"This is the highest amount we have bid for and there are still other proposals we have submitted," said Ralph Bennett (Crystal/Red Lake/Sawmill).

Under the plan, the chapter is hopeful they will secure additional funding. The funds will help to complete a multi-purpose building for the community of Crystal, N.M. The funding will help to complete funding for the building, which will house a head start program, library, senior program, an office for a community health representative, chapter offices, gymnasium and a sauna.

At the state legislative level, the ICIP is distributed to each state representative and senator at the beginning of each legislative session so legislators can identify and plan for improvements in each district. Because funding sources, in general, favor entities which plan, the ICIP is a perfect document to add or refer to in grant proposals.

Copeland speaks with chapter staff on a daily basis to ensure they are getting their ICIP plan completed and accurate. Copeland, who has worked for the Navajo Nation for the past 19 years, said it used to be common for chapters to ask for \$50,000 for a community center, when a basic community center's cost was near \$500,000.

"Chapters were not asking for proper amounts of money," said Copeland. If chapters did get the funds they requested, she said, they were not able to spend it because it would not be enough to get the project underway. The money would not get utilized and was then reverted back to the state.

"It was a Catch 22 type of thing," she said. The ICIP is set up to prevent such reversions from happening.

Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan expressed his appreciation to the state of New Mexico, the 54 Chapters and the council delegates for their persistence in securing vitally needed funds for their respective communities, he said, "I am happy to see our Navajo people moving towards more sound planning."

"Congratulations to the chapter officials and council delegates who have been awarded funding from the state," Speaker Morgan said. "Capital outlay improvement is crucial to building sustainable communities and you have done a great thing for your communities to secure these funds."

The ICIP is one of the few documents of its kind produced by any state government. It is considered to be a comprehensive and easily available document for reference by citizens, non-profit agencies, engineering and architectural firms and others.