

2025 SWREDA Conference
May 6 – 9, 2025 | Las Cruces, NM
***DRAFT* May 2, 2025**

Tuesday, May 6

12:00 – 6:00 p.m. Conference Registration & Information Desk Open Avenida

1:00 – 5:00 p.m. Executive Directors Leadership Institute San Rafael A

Based on interest from EDD executive directors—and those in position to fill the role—the Executive Director Leadership Institute (EDLI) will return for the third year in a row. The session will cover two topics of importance to EDD Executive Directors: storytelling and messaging the important work and impact their organizations have across their regions, and strategies to build executive director-board member relationships that benefit the communities they serve. The session will end with an opportunity for executive directors to connect with peers to discuss topics of interest. *There is no additional cost to attend, but pre-registration is required.*

Speakers:

- Reed Bobroff, Trainer
- Dr. Terra Winter, PhD, President and CEO, Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico

2:00 – 5:00 p.m. Storytelling and Grant Writing Workshop San Rafael B

Building a strong narrative that tells the story of your region and your vision for regional success can be pivotal for securing vital program funding from state and federal funding agencies. EDD program staff are encouraged to attend this Storytelling and Grant Writing Workshop to learn how to tell their region's story through state and federal grant applications and learn tips and tricks from leaders in the storytelling and grant writing fields. This workshop is supported by the Economic Development District Community of Practice, an EDA-supported NADO Research Foundation program meant to build capacity and skills across the national network of EDDs. *There is no additional cost to attend, but pre-registration is required.*

Speakers:

- Reed Bobroff, Trainer
- Dr. Hunter P. Goodman, PhD, Assistant Professor, Community, Workforce, and Economic Development, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

Wednesday, May 7

7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Conference Registration & Information Desk Open Avenida

8:00 – 9:30 a.m. SWREDA Board of Directors Meeting Cimarron

9:00 – 12:00 p.m. University Centers Meeting with EDA San Rafael B

EDA-funded University Center staff are encouraged to attend this important opportunity to meet with EDA Austin Regional Office staff to talk about your programs.

10:00 – 11:00 a.m. Calling All Cohorts: Training Program for Emerging Leaders Gathering

Tularosa

Participants from all seven cohorts are invited to gather with EDA and NADO Research Foundation staff to share your experiences in the program and its impact on your current position with your EDD. As we near the 10-year anniversary of the program's launch, feedback from participants will be invaluable as we consider strategies to provide future leaders with relevant training and access to a widening network of peers across the region and the nation.

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. SWREDA Membership Annual Business Meeting San Andres Ballroom

All Economic Development Districts from the EDA Austin region are encouraged to attend this meeting to learn more about SWREDA's governance, membership benefits, and future plans for the organization.

- **Moderator:** Jamie Setze, Chair, SWREDA and Executive Director, Capital Region Planning Commission

12:15 – 1:00 p.m. Networking Lunch San Andres Ballroom

Over a casual buffet lunch, attendees will have ample time to connect with colleagues they have not seen in a while and also meet with those new to their organizations and to SWREDA.

1:15 – 2:15 p.m. Opening Plenary: *Federal Legislative Update Perspectives from the National and Regional Levels* San Andres Ballroom

The change in the Administration will have implications for federal grant programs and services, including those managed by grantees across the EDA Austin Region. Attend this session to learn about the latest developments on Capitol Hill and in D.C. from both the national and regional perspectives.

- **Speakers:**
 - Joe McKinney, Executive Director, NADO
 - Chris Brown, Executive Director, Sulphur Springs (TX) Economic Development Corporation and Immediate Past President, NADO

2:15 – 2:30 p.m. Break

2:15 pm – 4:30 p.m. Mobile Workshop New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

The agriculture industry has been a vital economic driver for the New Mexico economy for decades. Come to the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum to learn about the history of the agriculture industry in New Mexico, what roles agriculture plays in the modern New Mexico economy, and where it will go from here. The New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum features interactive museum exhibits, several barns and animals on-site, an amphitheater, and the Heritage Garden project. ***There is an additional fee of \$40; pre-registration is required; limit of 30 participants. Bus loading in the hotel lobby at 2:15 pm.***

2:30 – 3:45 p.m. Concurrent Sessions

EDD Roles in Disaster Recovery

Tularosa

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) play a critical and evolving role in disaster recovery—before, during, and after a crisis. From planning and grant management to technical assistance and specialized recovery services, EDDs help communities navigate complex recovery processes and build long-term resilience. This session will highlight diverse approaches EDDs are using in the disaster space, share lessons learned from real-

world experience, and explore strategies for expanding or starting disaster recovery programs in your own region.

Speakers:

- Scott Harding, Executive Director, Eastern Oklahoma Development District, Muskogee, OK
- Steve Mills, Executive Director, Southern Oklahoma Development Association, Durant, OK

Moderator:

- Dion Thompson-Davoli, Program Manager, National Association of Development Organizations

Collaborations for Economic Development: University Center Roles with EDDs

San Rafael B

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) and University Centers (UCs) both receive planning and technical assistance support from EDA. While these organizations often times have similar goals and overlapping service areas, many EDDs and UCs have struggled to find ways to work together. Come to this session to learn from successful EDD/UC partnerships on how these organizations have formed mutually-beneficial relationships and what difference these partnerships are making for their communities.

Moderator:

- Dr. Hunter P. Goodman, PhD, Assistant Professor, Community, Workforce, and Economic Development, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

Speakers:

- Jan Smith, Executive Director, White River Planning and Economic Development District, Batesville, AR
- Lonnie Hunt, Executive Director, Deep East Texas Council of Governments
- Mary Ann Rojas, Executive Director, Center for Applied Research & Rural Innovation at Stephen F. Austin University

Conversation Café: Opportunities and Challenges on the Federal Funding Landscape

San Rafael A

Changes in federal funding have presented opportunities and challenges for regions across the Southwest. Come to this Conversation Café to share what challenges your region is facing and learn ways to maximize your organization's response to the changing federal landscape.

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Break

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

How to Establish an EDA RLF

San Rafael B

Are you an EDD interested in establishing an EDA-funded revolving loan fund (RLF)? Come join this session to learn more! Mary Louk, the Director of Credit at Grow America, will share general information about RLFs and then describe what you need to consider and prepare when you apply for an RLF. Next Kelly Criswell, the Director of Regional Services and Economic Development at South Plains Association of Governments, will share her experience as a COG with an RLF.

Speakers:

- Kelly Criswell, Director of Regional Services and Economic Development, South Plains Association of Governments, Lubbock, TX
- Mary Louk, Director of Credit, Grow America

A Closer Look at the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Tularosa

This session will provide an overview of the latest trends and best practices for creating and implementing effective Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS), ensuring they serve as valuable roadmaps for economic development and resilience. You'll also learn how the Coastal Bend Council of Governments developed its Regional Resilience Partnership to support CEDS implementation through hands-on technical assistance, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. Whether you are new to developing a CEDS or looking for a refresher, this session aims to provide timely guidance and information to enhance your economic development planning efforts.

Speakers:

- Emily Martinez, Executive Director, Coastal Bend Council of Governments, Corpus Christi, TX
- Brett Schwartz, Associate Director, NADO Research Foundation

5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Welcome Reception

Events Lawn

Join your peers from across the region to catch up over light snacks and beverages.

Thursday, May 8

7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Conference Registration & Information Desk Open

Avenida

7:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Mobile Workshop

Spaceport America Mobile Workshop

An abundance of acreage and near-perfect year-round weather provide the perfect location for Spaceport America—the first purpose-built commercial spaceport in the world. Spaceport expands over 18,000 acres next to the U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range and has access to 6,000 square miles of restricted airspace. Join this mobile workshop to visit Spaceport to learn about its critical role in the commercial space industry: what companies have located there, how it impacts the economy, future plans, financing, and much more. ***There is an additional fee of \$65; pre-registration is required; limit of 30 participants. Because the bus will need to leave the hotel at 8:00 a.m., we will provide a box breakfast to attendees on the bus.***

8:30 – 9:00 a.m.

Continental Breakfast

Avenida/ San Andres Ballroom

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions

Roundtable Discussion: Attracting, Retaining, & Nurturing EDD Staff

Tularosa

In an era of tight budgets and limited resources, how are Economic Development Districts (EDDs) attracting, retaining, and nurturing top talent? This interactive session will take place in small group discussions, offering participants the chance to share experiences, explore creative strategies, and learn directly from one another. Together, you'll dive into real-world approaches EDD leaders are using to recruit staff, build welcoming and engaging workplace cultures, and promote long-term retention. Topics may include employee benefits, flexible work policies, office environments, and other practices that foster a strong sense of belonging. Come ready to

exchange ideas, gain fresh perspectives, and leave with actionable takeaways to strengthen your organization's talent strategy.

- **Moderator:** Brett Schwartz, Associate Director, NADO Research Foundation

Regional Solid Waste Management Best Practices

San Rafael B

Regional organizations are often tasked with coordinating a regional approach to solid waste management. These “behind-the-scenes” partnerships cross municipal and county boundaries and create efficiencies of scale for solid waste management that is cost-effective and ensures quality delivery of services. Come to this session to hear from two regions in Texas on innovative best practices that can be easily replicated across the Southwest region.

Speakers:

- Susan G. Alvarez, PE, CFM, Director, Environment and Development, North Central Texas Council of Governments, Dallas, TX
- Chris Brown, Executive Director, Sulphur Springs (TX) Economic Development Corporation and Immediate Past President, NADO
- Ed Dominion, Chief Executive Officer, D6 Recycling

Conversation Café: Demystifying Match Requirements

San Rafael A

Match requirements have consistently been a barrier of entry for many rural organizations in accessing federal and state funding. These requirements can also be confusing with different requirements based on different funding sources. Come to this session to share your creative solutions to meeting match requirements and learn how other organizations are navigating match requirements for their communities.

10:00 – 10:15 a.m.

Break

10:15 am – 11:15 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions

Stronger Together: Building Partnerships in Economic Development

Tularosa

It is often said “economic development is a team sport.” In many communities and regions, there are several ‘players’ all with a mission advancing economic development. Join this session to hear examples of Economic Development Districts breaking down silos and strategically working together as a team with other economic development entities such as Economic Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce, or Port Authorities to plan, implement projects, and create economic prosperity.

Moderator: Dr. Hunter P. Goodman,

Speakers:

- Evan Williams, Executive Director, Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, Gallup, NM
- Annette Gutierrez, Executive Director, Rio Grande Council of Governments, El Paso, TX

The Breadth and Depth of University Center Work in the Southwest Region

San Rafael B

University Centers (UCs) are integral pieces of the economic development ecosystem across the Southwest Region. Whether it is producing detailed economic research for other economic development stakeholders and the public, providing technical assistance and other support functions to local business sectors or underserved communities, or leading statewide economic development planning initiatives, University Centers can play a

variety of roles in local, regional, and statewide economies. Come to this session to hear from successful UCs on their innovative approaches to economic development in their service areas.

Moderator: Chris Corbine, Aggie I-Corps Program Manager, Arrowhead Center at New Mexico State University

Speakers:

- John Nickel, Assistant Director, Cowboy Enterprises at Oklahoma State University
- Carlos Cuesta, Director Studio G, Arrowhead Center at New Mexico State University
- Mary Ann Rojas, Executive Director, Center for Applied Research & Rural Innovation at Stephen F. Austin University
- Kendall Ross, Associate Vice Chancellor, Economic & Workforce Development, University of Arkansas Fort Smith

Conversation Café: Organizational Resilience and Succession Planning

San Rafael A

Regional organizations have struggled with losing key program staff or leadership at inopportune times leading to a breakdown of services for communities and a lack of continuity in key program areas. Come to this Conversation Café to learn how other regional organizations are navigating succession planning for leadership and key program staff.

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

AI and Economic Development

San Rafael B

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a challenging topic for economic developers, especially since many of its potential impacts are still emerging. While tools like large language models have not yet transformed the field, change may be on the way. AI is starting to appear in the tools practitioners use and in the operations of private sector firms. This session will explore the opportunities and challenges that AI may bring to regional economies and how economic developers can begin to prepare.

Speakers:

- Donovan Fuqua, Ph.D., LTC(Ret), Associate Professor, Department of Accounting and Information Systems, New Mexico State University
- David Marek, Founder, DropDev

Regional Housing Initiatives

Tularosa

Housing has been at the forefront of regional planning and development work as communities are experiencing growing affordability issues. Many regional organizations may struggle with where to start housing programs and how to innovate existing housing programs to meet the needs of their communities. As every housing market is different, every region can take a unique, bespoke approach to housing that complements existing regional community and economic development services. Come to this session to learn more about innovative regional housing best practices.

Speakers:

- Kevin Belanger, Chief Executive Officer, South Central Planning and Development Commission, Houma, LA
- Claudia Brierre, Housing and Community Development Manager, Indian Nations Council of Governments, Tulsa, OK

- Claudia Mora, Regional Services Administrator, Alamo Area Council of Governments, San Antonio, TX

Conversation Café: Creative Organizational Revenue Streams

San Rafael A

Regional organizations have explored creative revenue streams outside of the typical federal and state funding arrangements that they have historically relied on. Come to this Conversation Café to share your ideas for revenue streams, discuss different fee-for-service models, and learn from other regional organizations on how they are building organizational resilience through revenue diversification.

12:15 – 1:30 p.m.

Plenary Luncheon

San Andres Ballroom

Connecting Earth to Space in the Land of Enchantment

Spaceport America Executive Director, Scott McLaughlin, will share the exciting history of Spaceport America's launch facility and walk attendees through the regional economic value of the world's first purpose-built commercial spaceport.

1:45 – 3:00 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

The 'Enchantment' Economy: Building the Recreation, Film, and Tourism Industries in New Mexico

Tularosa

Known as the "Land of Enchantment", New Mexico is home to stunning natural beauty—such as vast deserts and snowcapped peaks—and unique cultural heritage sites. Join this session to learn how leaders across the state are seeking to capitalize on these natural and cultural assets for tourism, but also sparking entrepreneurship and opening up industries such as film to showcase these assets to the world.

Speakers:

- Karina Armijo, Director, New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division, Albuquerque, NM
- Monica Abeita, Executive Director, North Central New Mexico EDD, Santa Fe, NM

RLF Underwriting for Start-Ups

San Rafael B

During this session, Mary Louk, the Director of Credit, at Grow America and Kelly Criswell, the Director of Regional Services and Economic Development, at South Plains Association of Governments will share best practices when underwriting start-ups. Topics will include what makes start-ups so challenging compared to existing businesses, the documents you should require from start-ups, tips on evaluating projections, and more.

Speakers:

- Kelly Criswell, Director of Regional Services and Economic Development, South Plains Association of Governments, Lubbock, TX
- Mary Louk, Director of Credit, Grow America

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Plenary Session: Star of the Southwest Award Showcase **San Andres Ballroom**

The 2025 recipients of the Star of the Southwest Award will share the ingredients of their successful projects: partners, funding, strategies, impact, and much more. This session is a prelude to the Roundtable Reception

which follows immediately afterward. During the reception you can meet one-on-one with the awardees for a deeper dive into their projects.

5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Star of the Southwest Award Roundtable Reception

Events Lawn

Celebrate the 2025 Star of the Southwest Award recipients and learn more about the six Star of the Southwest Award projects over light snacks and beverages.

Friday, May 9

7:45 – 11:00 a.m.

Conference Registration & Information Desk Open

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

Good Conversations Breakfast

San Andres Ballroom

Enjoy breakfast with your peers as you discuss identified topics of interest from across the EDA-Auston region. Attendees will help offer topic ideas throughout the conference located on the whiteboard in the conference registration area.

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

Closing Plenary: *Economic State of the Region*

San Andres Ballroom

Brian Kelsey, Manager of Economic Development Advisory Services at Ernst & Young LLP, will provide an economic overview of the Southwest Region with key metrics, data points, and overarching economic trends that regional development organizations must know going into 2025 and beyond. Attend this Closing Plenary to gain insight into key strategies and trends that will impact your work at the local, regional, statewide, and national level. Closing conference remarks will be offered by the incoming SWREDA Board Chair.