

Río Grande Trail Association

Governance Report

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to support the formation of the Río Grande Trail Association

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RÍO GRANDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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Executive Summary

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) Governance Report documents the governance framework developed to establish the Rio Grande Trail Association as the independent nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. Prepared under contract with the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), the report summarizes the public engagement process, organizational framework, governance recommendations, Board development strategy, funding readiness, and organizational launch priorities developed during formation of the Association.

The Governance Report is intended to complement—not replace—the Association's Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and other supporting governance documents. Rather than repeating those materials, this report explains how they work together to establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective organizational leadership, sound financial stewardship, strategic planning, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

Together, these documents provide the inaugural Board of Directors with the legal, organizational, and strategic foundation needed to launch the Association, establish effective governance practices, build organizational capacity, and support the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail.

I. Introduction

The Rio Grande Trail is a long-term statewide initiative to establish a continuous recreational trail following the Rio Grande through New Mexico. Advancing this vision requires collaboration among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners. Because no single organization has the authority or capacity to complete every aspect of the trail, long-term implementation depends on coordinated leadership, sustained partnerships, and broad public support.

Recognizing this need, the New Mexico Legislature established the Rio Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) to provide statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the trail. The Commission works with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), the Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD), the State

Parks Division (SPD), governmental agencies, and regional partners to support planning and implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

A. Creation of the Rio Grande Trail Association

To complement these public efforts, EMNRD contracted with Fundraising for the Future to facilitate public engagement, evaluate nonprofit organizational models, develop governance recommendations, recruit an inaugural Board of Directors, prepare organizational governing documents, and support establishment of the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA).

The RGTA was formed as an independent New Mexico nonprofit corporation to serve as the primary nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

The Association does not exercise regulatory authority or land management responsibilities. Those responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and land managers. Instead, the RGTA complements these organizations by building partnerships, mobilizing financial and volunteer resources, supporting stewardship and public engagement, increasing public awareness, and strengthening the organizational capacity needed to advance shared trail objectives.

B. Relationship with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

EMNRD serves as the lead state agency responsible for administration of the Rio Grande Trail initiative and provides staff support to the Rio Grande Trail Commission through the Outdoor Recreation Division and State Parks Division. Through this contract, EMNRD initiated formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association to establish an independent nonprofit organization capable of providing long-term organizational support for the statewide trail initiative.

As an independent nonprofit corporation, the RGTA will collaborate with EMNRD on matters of mutual interest while maintaining its own Board of Directors, governance structure, funding strategy, and organizational priorities.

C. Relationship with the Rio Grande Trail Commission

The Rio Grande Trail Commission provides statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the Rio Grande Trail. The RGTA serves as the Commission's primary nonprofit partner by supporting implementation through fundraising, partnership development, stewardship, communications, education, volunteer engagement, and organizational capacity.

The Association does not replace or direct the Commission's responsibilities, nor does the Commission govern the Association. Rather, the two organizations are intended to maintain a collaborative working relationship that leverages the strengths of each organization while respecting their distinct roles and responsibilities. Coordination will be supported through regular communication, annual planning, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI).

D. Purpose of this Governance Report

This Governance Report documents the governance framework developed to establish the Rio Grande Trail Association and provides guidance for the Association's initial governance and organizational development. The report summarizes the public engagement process, organizational framework, governance structure, Board development, funding readiness, and organizational launch priorities developed during formation of the Association.

The report is intended to be read in conjunction with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and other supporting governance documents. Together, these documents establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective organizational leadership, strategic planning, financial stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

II. Public Engagement Summary

Public engagement was a foundational component of establishing the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA). Through public meetings, stakeholder outreach, questionnaires, interviews, and regional engagement, the project gathered input from governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, outdoor recreation organizations, conservation groups, philanthropic organizations, community leaders, and members of the public throughout

New Mexico. This engagement informed development of the Association's Mission, governance framework, Board development strategy, and Strategic Plan.

A. Public Engagement Process

The public engagement program was designed to ensure the proposed governance framework reflected the diverse interests, communities, and organizations connected to the Rio Grande Trail. Engagement activities included:

- Public meetings to introduce the proposed nonprofit organization, gather community feedback, and identify organizational priorities.
- Stakeholder meetings with governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, outdoor recreation organizations, conservation groups, philanthropic organizations, and other implementation partners.
- Statewide questionnaires and individual interviews regarding organizational priorities, governance, partnership opportunities, and public participation.
- Regional outreach throughout northern, central, and southern New Mexico to ensure broad geographic representation and consideration of regional perspectives.

Consistent with the project scope of work, stakeholder engagement included organizations representing outdoor recreation, trail stewardship, conservation, outdoor equity, governmental agencies, special districts, philanthropic organizations, Rio Grande Trail Commissioners, and other stakeholders whose perspectives could inform formation of the Association.

B. Tribal Engagement

Recognizing the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and their unique relationship to the Rio Grande corridor, the project included a dedicated Tribal engagement component separate from general public outreach. Consistent with the project scope, outreach was coordinated with the Rio Grande Trail Commission Tribal Engagement Subcommittee to request meetings with federally recognized Tribal Nations and Pueblos identified by the Contract Manager.

The governance framework and Strategic Plan recognize the importance of building respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while acknowledging that government-to-government consultation responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies.

C. Major Findings

Public engagement demonstrated broad support for establishing an independent nonprofit organization to support the long-term planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. Several consistent themes emerged:

- Strong support for an independent nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations while respecting their distinct authorities and responsibilities.
- Recognition that successful implementation of the Rio Grande Trail will require long-term partnerships, diversified funding, sustained community engagement, and coordinated leadership.
- Broad support for protecting the cultural, historical, agricultural, environmental, and recreational resources of the Rio Grande corridor through responsible stewardship and public education.
- Strong interest in regional implementation approaches that recognize the unique needs and opportunities of northern, central, and southern New Mexico while advancing a shared statewide vision.
- Recognition that the Association should be governed by a diverse Board of Directors reflecting the geographic, cultural, professional, and community interests represented along the Rio Grande Trail corridor.

D. Influence on Organizational Development

Public engagement directly shaped the organizational framework developed for the Rio Grande Trail Association.

Mission and Organizational Purpose

Public input confirmed the importance of creating an organization that complements the work of governmental agencies and land managers through partnership development, stewardship, fundraising, education, public engagement, and organizational support.

Governance Framework

Stakeholders emphasized transparency, accountability, collaboration, broad representation, and clearly defined organizational roles. These priorities informed development of the Association's governance philosophy, organizational boundaries, Board responsibilities, committee structure, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI).

Board Development

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of a geographically and professionally diverse Board of Directors. Recruitment recommendations therefore focused on regional representation, broad professional expertise, leadership development, succession planning, and long-term organizational sustainability.

Strategic Planning

Community priorities directly informed development of the Strategic Plan and its seven Strategic Priorities, establishing a long-term framework for partnership development, stewardship, communications, funding, organizational capacity, and implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

E. Relationship to the Public Engagement Report

This chapter summarizes the public engagement process and its influence on the formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association. Detailed information regarding public meetings, stakeholder outreach, Tribal engagement, questionnaires, interviews, participation, survey results, and supporting documentation is provided in the Rio Grande Trail Association Public Engagement Report, which should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report. Figure 2.1 illustrates how stakeholder input informed development of the Association's Mission, governance framework, Board development strategy, and Strategic Plan.

Figure 2.1 – Public Engagement Process and Organizational Development



III. Organizational Framework

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) was established to serve as the independent nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. The organizational framework described in this chapter defines the Association's Mission, organizational role, guiding principles, and relationships with the governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations that collectively advance the Rio Grande Trail throughout New Mexico.

Developed through public engagement, organizational research, and strategic planning, this framework provides the foundation for effective governance, partnership development, organizational growth, and long-term implementation of the Association's Strategic Plan.

The complete organizational framework—including the Mission, Vision, Purpose, Commitment, Strategic Priorities, implementation strategy, and Performance Measurement Framework—is contained in the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan, which should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report.

Mission, Vision, Purpose, and Commitment

The Association's Mission, Vision, Purpose, and Commitment establish the foundation for all organizational activities and guide governance, planning, fundraising, partnerships, and program development.

- **Mission:** The Rio Grande Trail Association supports the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail by building partnerships, engaging communities, mobilizing resources, and advancing a shared vision for a continuous statewide trail that benefits present and future generations.
- **Vision:** The Rio Grande Trail will become a continuous statewide trail that connects New Mexico's communities, landscapes, cultures, and history while supporting outdoor recreation, conservation, education, public health, heritage tourism, economic vitality, and quality of life.
- **Purpose:** The Rio Grande Trail Association exists to provide the nonprofit leadership, organizational capacity, fundraising, volunteer coordination, stewardship, education, communications, and partnership development needed to support the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

- **Commitment:** The Association is committed to advancing the Rio Grande Trail through collaboration, responsible stewardship, public education, and meaningful community engagement. The RGTA seeks to build respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while working collaboratively with governmental agencies, acequia associations, land grants, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and communities to help ensure the trail reflects and benefits the diverse people and landscapes it serves.

A. Organizational Role

The Rio Grande Trail Association serves as the primary nonprofit partner supporting implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. While governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and land managers retain responsibility for policy, regulation, land management, permitting, construction, and operations within their respective jurisdictions, the Association provides the organizational continuity, community engagement, and resource development needed to help advance shared trail objectives.

The Association fulfills this role by:

- Building partnerships among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community organizations.
- Mobilizing financial resources, volunteers, stewardship initiatives, education, communications, and public engagement that support the Rio Grande Trail.
- Supporting planning, stewardship, implementation, and organizational capacity through collaboration with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Organizational Boundaries

The Rio Grande Trail Association complements—but does not replace—the responsibilities of governmental agencies and land managers. The Association does not exercise regulatory authority, own or manage trail lands, issue permits, or direct governmental decision-making.

Instead, the Association focuses on functions that are most effectively performed by an independent nonprofit organization, including partnership development, fundraising, volunteer engagement, stewardship, education, communications, advocacy, and organizational support. Maintaining these clear organizational boundaries strengthens

collaboration while respecting the legal authorities, responsibilities, and decision-making processes of implementation partners.

B. Organizational Relationships

Successful implementation of the Rio Grande Trail depends upon collaboration among organizations with distinct authorities, responsibilities, and areas of expertise. The Association's role is to strengthen these relationships by providing coordination, organizational capacity, and community support that complements the work of governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Governmental Agencies

The Association will collaborate with federal, state, regional, and local governmental agencies responsible for recreation, conservation, transportation, land management, public safety, and other functions related to the Rio Grande Trail. The Association supports these agencies through partnership development, fundraising, volunteer coordination, stewardship, education, communications, and community engagement.

Rio Grande Trail Commission

The Rio Grande Trail Commission provides statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the Rio Grande Trail. The Association serves as the Commission's primary nonprofit partner by supporting implementation through organizational capacity, fundraising, stewardship, education, communications, volunteer engagement, and partnership development. Coordination between the Commission and the Association will occur through regular communication, annual planning, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), which clarifies organizational roles and areas of collaboration.

Tribal Nations and Pueblos

The Association recognizes the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and is committed to building respectful, long-term relationships founded on collaboration, mutual respect, and recognition of Tribal sovereignty. Government-to-government consultation responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies. The Association may support communication, partnership development, education, and collaborative initiatives when invited and appropriate, while respecting the priorities, protocols, and decision-making authority of each sovereign government.

Partner Organizations

The Association will work collaboratively with nonprofit organizations, conservation organizations, outdoor recreation groups, educational institutions, businesses, philanthropic organizations, community organizations, and other implementation

partners whose missions align with advancing the Rio Grande Trail. These partnerships expand organizational capacity, leverage expertise and resources, and strengthen public support for the trail throughout New Mexico.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan

This chapter summarizes the organizational framework established for the Rio Grande Trail Association. The Strategic Plan provides the Association's complete Mission, Vision, Purpose, Commitment, Strategic Priorities, implementation strategy, regional implementation framework, governance philosophy, funding strategy, and Performance Measurement Framework.

Together, the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and this Governance Report establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective leadership, responsible stewardship, organizational accountability, and the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

IV. Governance Framework

The governance framework of the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) establishes the leadership structure, decision-making processes, and accountability systems that guide the Association in fulfilling its Mission. Developed in conjunction with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Strategic Plan, the governance framework promotes effective organizational leadership, sound financial stewardship, transparent decision-making, and long-term organizational sustainability.

The Articles of Incorporation establish the Association as a New Mexico nonprofit corporation, while the Bylaws define the legal authority, governance structure, and operating procedures of the organization. This chapter summarizes the governance framework established through those documents and explains how governance supports implementation of the Strategic Plan.

A. Governance Philosophy

The Rio Grande Trail Association is committed to governance practices that promote transparency, accountability, ethical leadership, collaboration, and responsible stewardship of organizational resources. The Board of Directors will exercise its fiduciary responsibilities in a manner that advances the Association's Mission, Strategic

Plan, and long-term organizational sustainability while fostering a culture of trust, respect, and informed decision-making.

The Board is committed to:

- **Transparent and accountable governance** by conducting its work ethically, exercising sound fiscal stewardship, and responsibly managing the Association's financial and organizational resources.
- **Collaborative leadership** by working constructively with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, partner organizations, volunteers, and the communities served by the Association.
- **Informed decision-making** by considering the Strategic Plan, organizational performance, community input, partnership opportunities, and available information when establishing priorities and making organizational decisions.
- **Continuous improvement** by monitoring organizational performance, reviewing governance practices, and evaluating the Strategic Plan annually to ensure the Association remains responsive to changing conditions, opportunities, and community needs.

B. Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the Rio Grande Trail Association and is responsible for providing strategic leadership, establishing organizational policy, exercising fiduciary oversight, and ensuring that the Association fulfills its Mission in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.

The Board establishes the Association's long-term direction by:

- Adopting and periodically updating the Strategic Plan.
- Approving the Annual Work Plan and annual operating budget.
- Monitoring organizational performance and financial health.
- Supporting organizational sustainability through sound governance and resource stewardship.
- Providing oversight of the Association's leadership, programs, and partnerships.

C. Organizational Leadership Structure

Officers

The Association's officers provide leadership for the Board of Directors and support the effective administration of Board business in accordance with the Bylaws. Officers

facilitate Board governance, support organizational oversight, maintain official records, oversee financial reporting, and carry out other responsibilities assigned by the Board.

Committees

The Board may establish standing committees, ad hoc committees, and subject matter working groups to assist in carrying out its governance responsibilities and advancing implementation of the Strategic Plan. Committees provide recommendations to the Board, assist with planning and organizational oversight, and engage volunteers and subject matter experts in support of the Association's work.

Advisory Board and Regional Advisory Groups

The governance framework encourages broad participation through advisory bodies that provide technical expertise, regional perspectives, and community input. Advisory Board members and regional advisory groups support the Association by offering specialized knowledge, strengthening regional relationships, and expanding opportunities for stakeholder engagement throughout northern, central, and southern New Mexico.

These advisory bodies serve in an advisory capacity and do not exercise governance authority unless specifically authorized by the Board.

D. Decision-Making and Organizational Coordination

The Board of Directors is responsible for organizational decision-making and exercises its authority in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and adopted governance policies. Decisions should be guided by the Association's Mission, Strategic Plan, fiduciary responsibilities, organizational priorities, and available information.

To support effective collaboration, the Association will use governance policies, committee charters, Annual Work Plans, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) to clarify organizational roles, decision-making authority, communication pathways, and coordination among the Board of Directors, committees, staff, contractors, volunteers, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and partner organizations.

E. Financial Stewardship

The Board of Directors is responsible for safeguarding the Association's financial resources and ensuring sound financial management. Responsibilities include approving annual budgets, monitoring financial performance, overseeing financial

reporting, supporting diversified resource development, and ensuring compliance with applicable legal and nonprofit financial requirements.

As organizational capacity grows, the Board may engage qualified accounting, bookkeeping, auditing, legal, and financial professionals to support these responsibilities while retaining overall fiduciary oversight.

F. Ethical Governance

The Association is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct and public accountability. Members of the Board of Directors, officers, committee members, and others acting on behalf of the Association are expected to conduct organizational business in the best interests of the Association and to disclose actual or potential conflicts of interest in accordance with the Bylaws and organizational policies.

The Board will periodically review governance practices and adopt additional policies, as appropriate, to support ethical leadership, organizational integrity, and public trust.

G. Organizational Accountability

Accountability is achieved through regular governance review, financial oversight, strategic planning, and performance evaluation. The Board will monitor organizational performance through:

- Annual organizational planning and budgeting.
- Regular financial reporting.
- Implementation of the Performance Measurement Framework.
- Annual review of the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.
- Compliance with applicable legal, financial, and reporting requirements.
- Periodic review of governance policies and organizational practices.

These practices support continuous organizational improvement and help ensure that the Association remains responsive to its Mission, partners, and the communities it serves.

H. Relationship to the Governing Documents

The governance framework described in this chapter is implemented through the Association's governing documents. The Articles of Incorporation establish the legal

corporation, the Bylaws define the governance structure and organizational procedures, the Strategic Plan establishes long-term direction and priorities, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) clarifies organizational roles and coordination with implementation partners.

Together, these documents provide the governance framework that enables the Board of Directors to lead the Association effectively while supporting long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

V. Board Development

A strong and representative Board of Directors is essential to the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail Association. As part of the Association's formation, the project included development of a Board recruitment strategy, identification of prospective Board members, establishment of governance recommendations, and creation of organizational documents to support the Board's transition from formation to active governance.

The Board development process was designed to establish an initial governing body capable of providing strategic leadership, fiduciary oversight, and long-term organizational stewardship while reflecting the geographic, cultural, and professional diversity of the Rio Grande Trail corridor.

A. Board Composition

The Bylaws establish the composition, authority, terms of office, and governance responsibilities of the Board of Directors. Recruitment efforts sought to establish a Board with diverse geographic representation and a broad range of professional experience to support the Association's Mission and long-term organizational sustainability.

Board recruitment sought individuals with experience in areas such as:

- Outdoor recreation and trail development
- Conservation and natural resource management
- Nonprofit leadership and governance
- Fundraising and philanthropy
- Finance and accounting
- Communications and public engagement
- Public administration and government relations

- Tribal relations and cultural resources
- Community and economic development
- Legal, business, and organizational leadership

As the Association grows, future recruitment should continue to strengthen the diversity of perspectives, experience, and regional representation needed to support statewide implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

B. Board Recruitment and Selection

The Board recruitment process was designed to identify individuals with demonstrated leadership, professional expertise, and a commitment to advancing the Mission of the Rio Grande Trail Association. Recruitment emphasized collaboration, geographic representation, and the diverse skills needed to support the Association's long-term governance and organizational sustainability.

The Association's initial founding Board consisted of three individuals—one representing each of New Mexico's northern, central, and southern regions—who were recommended by members of the Rio Grande Trail Commission's Nonprofit Organization Subcommittee to guide formation of the Association.

Additional prospective Board members were identified through the public engagement process, stakeholder outreach, professional networks, and recommendations from organizations and individuals involved in development of the Rio Grande Trail. Following evaluation of prospective candidates, 12 invitation letters were extended to individuals throughout New Mexico with the goal of establishing a geographically representative Board with broad professional expertise.

Six invitees, together with the three founding Board members, participated in the Association's four strategic planning meetings, providing input on the organization's Mission, governance framework, and Strategic Plan. Of the six invited participants, five accepted appointments to serve on the inaugural Board of Directors, while one elected to remain involved in an advisory capacity. The remaining invitees either declined or did not respond to the invitation.

The Board candidate list, recruitment materials, and invitation process developed during the organizational formation process provide a foundation for future Board recruitment as vacancies occur and organizational needs evolve. Future recruitment should continue to strengthen geographic representation, professional diversity, and the leadership capacity needed to support implementation of the Strategic Plan.

C. Organizational Leadership Development

The Association's long-term effectiveness depends upon continuing investment in Board leadership and governance capacity. Beyond recruiting qualified Board members, the Association should provide ongoing orientation, governance education, and leadership development that supports informed decision-making and responsible stewardship of organizational resources.

Board development activities should include:

- Orientation for new Board members.
- Ongoing governance and fiduciary training.
- Review of organizational governance documents.
- Strategic planning participation.
- Committee leadership development.
- Succession planning for officers and committee leadership.
- Periodic Board self-assessment and governance evaluation.

These practices support continuity, strengthen organizational knowledge, and prepare future leaders as the Association grows.

D. Regional Representation

Because the Rio Grande Trail extends through diverse landscapes and communities across New Mexico, effective governance depends on broad geographic representation and meaningful engagement throughout the trail corridor.

The Association's governance framework encourages representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico while recognizing the importance of diverse cultural, professional, and community perspectives. As future Board vacancies occur, recruitment efforts should continue to strengthen regional representation and organizational capacity consistent with the Strategic Plan.

The inaugural Board of Directors consists of eight members representing the geographic diversity of the Rio Grande Trail corridor, including one representative from a Tribal Nation, three members from northern New Mexico, one member from central New Mexico, and three members from southern New Mexico. As the Association evolves, future recruitment should continue to strengthen geographic representation while expanding the Board's professional expertise, cultural perspectives, and leadership capacity.

E. Board Expertise

The inaugural Board of Directors brings together a broad range of professional expertise and community perspectives that support the Association's Mission and long-term organizational sustainability. Collectively, Board members provide experience in Tribal leadership and cultural knowledge; outdoor recreation, trail planning, and trail infrastructure design; land management and conservation; tourism and economic development; nonprofit governance and Board service; fundraising, philanthropy, grant writing, and nonprofit administration; finance, accounting, and business management; communications, marketing, and public outreach; community engagement; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); legal services; and education and interpretation.

This combination of expertise provides the Association with a strong foundation for governance, strategic planning, partnership development, fundraising, stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

F. Board Transition and Organizational Readiness

The work completed during formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association provides the inaugural Board with a comprehensive governance framework and supporting organizational documents necessary to begin governing the Association immediately.

The Board's initial responsibilities are to adopt these governance documents, establish annual organizational priorities, implement the Strategic Plan, oversee financial management, strengthen partnerships, and guide the Association through its first years of operation.

G. Relationship to the Strategic Plan and Bylaws

The Strategic Plan establishes the Association's long-term governance objectives, leadership development priorities, and organizational capacity goals, while the Bylaws define the legal authority, composition, responsibilities, and procedures of the Board of Directors.

This chapter summarizes the Board development process undertaken during formation of the Association and provides recommendations for continued Board development and organizational leadership as the Association evolves.

VI. Funding Readiness

The long-term success of the RGTA depends upon a diversified funding strategy that supports organizational operations while advancing implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. During formation of the Association, a comprehensive funding prospecting effort identified public, philanthropic, corporate, and community funding opportunities aligned with the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

A. Funding Strategy

The RGTA will pursue a diversified resource development strategy that combines public funding, private philanthropy, corporate partnerships, memberships, sponsorships, individual giving, and community fundraising. This approach recognizes that implementation of a statewide trail initiative will require multiple complementary revenue sources that support both organizational sustainability and trail-related projects.

Funding priorities will evolve as the Association grows from a Board-led startup organization to a professionally staffed nonprofit capable of supporting statewide trail implementation, stewardship, education, communications, and partnership development. Early fundraising efforts will emphasize organizational capacity, relationship development, and startup funding while establishing the systems necessary to pursue larger public and philanthropic investments over time.

The Association's comprehensive funding strategy is described in the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan.

B. Funding Prospect Development

A comprehensive Funding Prospect List was developed during the organizational formation process to identify funding opportunities aligned with the Association's Mission, organizational capacity, and anticipated program areas. Each opportunity was evaluated for organizational fit, eligibility, competitiveness, funding potential, timing, and strategic value. The Funding Prospect List is intended to serve as a living resource that will be reviewed and updated regularly as organizational priorities and funding opportunities evolve.

C. Public Funding

Public funding will play an important role in supporting both organizational development and long-term trail implementation. The prospecting effort identified numerous federal, state, and local funding opportunities that align with the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

Priority public funding opportunities include state legislative appropriations, outdoor recreation and trail infrastructure grants, tourism and destination development programs, environmental stewardship initiatives, and federal technical assistance programs. Several opportunities encourage collaborative proposals involving governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and regional partners, reinforcing the importance of strong partnerships throughout implementation.

As organizational capacity grows, the Association will work with governmental agencies and partner organizations, as appropriate, to pursue funding opportunities that support trail planning, stewardship, education, public access, conservation, interpretation, and community engagement.

D. Foundation Funding

The prospecting effort identified numerous private and community foundations whose funding priorities closely align with the Association's work. These organizations support initiatives related to outdoor recreation, conservation, environmental stewardship, rural community development, cultural preservation, organizational capacity building, education, public access, and healthy communities.

Foundation funding will be particularly important during the Association's early years by providing organizational capacity funding, strategic planning support, community engagement resources, stewardship programming, and pilot project funding. As the Association establishes a successful funding history and demonstrates organizational capacity, larger foundation partnerships may support multi-year initiatives and regional implementation projects.

E. Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorships

Corporate partnerships provide opportunities to expand both financial support and community engagement. The funding prospect list identifies corporations and corporate giving programs with demonstrated interests in outdoor recreation, trail stewardship, conservation, tourism, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities.

The Association will seek sponsorships and collaborative partnerships that support volunteer stewardship activities, educational programs, trail amenities, community

events, public awareness initiatives, and statewide outreach. Corporate partnerships may also provide in-kind contributions, professional services, equipment, volunteer participation, and other resources that strengthen organizational capacity.

F. Memberships and Individual Giving

A statewide membership and individual giving program will provide recurring unrestricted revenue while strengthening public ownership and long-term support for the Rio Grande Trail. Membership opportunities will allow individuals, families, businesses, and organizations to participate directly in advancing the Association's Mission through annual memberships, recurring donations, volunteer participation, and community stewardship activities.

Individual giving, major donor cultivation, planned giving, and annual fundraising campaigns will complement grant funding by providing flexible financial resources that support organizational operations and strategic priorities.

G. Annual Fundraising Planning

The Board of Directors will oversee development of an annual fundraising strategy that aligns resource development activities with the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan. The annual fundraising process will include:

- Review and update of the Funding Prospect List.
- Identification of annual fundraising priorities and revenue goals.
- Development of an annual grants calendar.
- Coordination of public funding and legislative opportunities.
- Board participation in donor cultivation and relationship development.
- Evaluation of funding performance and resource development outcomes.

This annual planning process will enable the Association to respond to emerging opportunities while maintaining a balanced and diversified funding portfolio.

H. Relationship to the Strategic Plan

Funding is an enabling strategy that supports implementation of every Strategic Priority. The Strategic Plan, Funding Prospect List, Annual Work Plan, and annual fundraising calendar collectively provide the framework for coordinating resource development with organizational priorities, project readiness, partnership opportunities, and available organizational capacity.

I. Relationship to the Funding Prospect List

This chapter summarizes the Association's overall funding readiness and resource development strategy. Detailed information regarding prospective funders, application priorities, eligibility requirements, recommended funding levels, application timelines, and funding strategies is provided in the Rio Grande Trail Association Funding Prospect List, which serves as a working resource for the Board of Directors and future staff in implementing the Association's annual fundraising program.

As part of the organizational formation process, 71 potential public and private funding opportunities were identified to support organizational capacity, trail planning, stewardship, education, community engagement, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. The prospect list is intended to be a living resource that will be reviewed and updated annually as organizational priorities, funding opportunities, and project readiness evolve.

Examples of funding opportunities identified include:

- **Public Funding & Technical Assistance:** State appropriations, Trails+, Destination Forward, River Stewardship Program, National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program
- **Private Foundations:** McCune Foundation, LOR Foundation, Taos Community Foundation, Catena Foundation, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- **Corporate Giving:** New Belgium Brewing, onX, PNM Foundation
- **National Trail & Recreation Organizations:** Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)
- **Membership & Individual Giving:** Annual membership program, individual donors, major gifts, recurring giving
- **Community & Regional Partnerships:** Community fundraising events, sponsorships, volunteer stewardship, and in-kind contributions

VII. Organizational Launch Priorities

The Organizational Launch Priorities provide the inaugural Board with the immediate governance, administrative, financial, and organizational actions needed to transition the Association from formation to implementation.

A. Governance and Organizational Leadership

The Board's first responsibility is to establish the governance framework that will guide the Association's operations. Initial governance activities include organizing the Board, electing officers, establishing committees, adopting governance practices, and confirming organizational priorities.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt the Strategic Plan as the Association's primary long-range planning document.
- Elect officers in accordance with the Bylaws.
- Establish Board committees and appoint committee members and committee leadership.
- Approve the Annual Work Plan and Board calendar.
- Review the Governance Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), and other foundational governance documents.
- Establish regular Board meeting schedules and governance procedures.

B. Organizational Administration

The Association must establish the administrative systems necessary to support nonprofit operations and maintain compliance with applicable legal and financial requirements.

Priority actions include:

- Complete required organizational filings with the State of New Mexico and other applicable regulatory agencies.
- Establish organizational banking relationships and financial accounts.
- Implement accounting, financial management, and internal control systems.
- Obtain appropriate organizational insurance coverage.
- Establish records management, document retention, and administrative procedures.
- Develop technology, communications, donor management, and other organizational systems necessary to support operations.

C. Financial Management and Resource Development

Establishing sustainable funding is essential to the Association's long-term success. During its first year, the Board should focus on building the organizational capacity necessary to support future fundraising while initiating resource development activities consistent with the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt an annual fundraising strategy and resource development goals.
- Review and prioritize the Funding Prospect List.
- Develop an annual grants calendar and funding schedule.
- Pursue startup funding, memberships, sponsorships, donations, and initial grant opportunities.
- Develop relationships with public agencies, foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors.
- Coordinate legislative and public funding opportunities, as appropriate.

D. Partnerships and Organizational Development

The Association's success depends upon maintaining strong working relationships with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and community partners.

During its first year, the Board should focus on strengthening organizational relationships while establishing the Association as the primary nonprofit partner supporting the Rio Grande Trail.

Priority actions include:

- Establish regular coordination with the Rio Grande Trail Commission.
- Strengthen relationships with governmental agencies and partner organizations.
- Support development of regional partnerships and volunteer networks.
- Continue Board recruitment and succession planning as organizational needs evolve.
- Determine staffing priorities and engage employees, contractors, consultants, or volunteers as organizational capacity and financial resources allow.

E. Strategic Implementation

The Strategic Plan establishes the Association's long-term direction; however, successful implementation depends upon translating those priorities into annual organizational objectives and measurable actions.

The Board should establish an annual planning process that aligns organizational priorities, funding activities, committee work, and performance evaluation with the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt the Annual Work Plan.
- Establish organizational performance measures and annual reporting procedures.
- Monitor implementation of Strategic Priorities.
- Review progress toward organizational goals throughout the year.
- Review and update the Strategic Plan annually based on organizational performance, funding opportunities, community input, and emerging priorities.

F. Legislative and Public Funding Coordination

The Association will play an important role in supporting public investment in the Rio Grande Trail by identifying funding opportunities, developing relationships with legislators and governmental agencies, and coordinating public funding strategies.

During its first year, the Board should establish an annual legislative and public funding strategy that supports the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

Priority actions include:

- Identify legislative and public funding priorities.
- Coordinate funding strategies with the Rio Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations, as appropriate.
- Support development of funding requests, legislative materials, and public funding initiatives.
- Review legislative priorities annually as part of the Association's planning process.

G. Performance Measurement & Continuous Improvement

The Board is responsible for monitoring organizational performance and ensuring the Association continues to operate effectively and in furtherance of its Mission.

Performance evaluation should be integrated into the Association's annual planning cycle through regular review of organizational accomplishments, financial performance, fundraising outcomes, partnership development, and implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Implement the Performance Measurement Framework.

- Monitor progress toward Strategic Plan goals.
- Prepare and publish an Annual Report.
- Conduct annual Board self-assessments and governance reviews.
- Review organizational priorities and adjust Annual Work Plans as conditions and opportunities evolve.

H. Relationship to the Strategic Plan

This chapter summarizes the initial organizational priorities that will guide the Rio Grande Trail Association during its transition from formation to active implementation. The detailed implementation schedule, organizational milestones, and long-term priorities are contained in the Implementation Timeline and Board Work Plan of the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan.

Together, the Governance Report, Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Funding Prospect List, Board Calendar, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) provide the governance and organizational framework needed to support the successful launch and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

VIII. Governance Documents

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) governance framework consists of a coordinated set of legal, governance, planning, and management documents developed during the Association's formation. Each document serves a distinct purpose while collectively establishing the legal authority, organizational structure, strategic direction, governance practices, implementation framework, and accountability systems necessary to support the Association's Mission and long-term sustainability.

Rather than functioning as independent documents, these resources are intended to operate as an integrated governance system that provides the Board of Directors with the tools needed to govern the Association, establish organizational priorities, monitor performance, and support implementation of the Strategic Plan.

A. Governance Framework Documents

The following governance documents collectively establish the organizational foundation of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

- **Articles of Incorporation:** Establishes the Rio Grande Trail Association as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of New Mexico and defines its legal existence and charitable purpose.
- **Bylaws:** Establishes the Association's governance structure by defining the authority of the Board of Directors, officers, committees, fiduciary responsibilities, and organizational procedures.
- **Strategic Plan:** Establishes the Association's Mission, Vision, Strategic Priorities, implementation framework, funding strategy, governance philosophy, and long-term organizational direction.
- **Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI):** Outlines organizational roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, communication pathways, and coordination among the Association and its implementation partners.
- **Annual Work Plan:** Translates the Strategic Plan into annual priorities, projects, responsibilities, and implementation activities.
- **Board Calendar:** Establishes the annual governance cycle and recurring Board responsibilities, including strategic planning, budgeting, fundraising oversight, governance activities, and organizational reporting.
- **Performance Measurement Framework:** Outlines ways to monitor organizational performance, evaluate implementation of the Strategic Plan, and support continuous organizational improvement through measurable outcomes.

B. Integrated Governance System

Together, these documents provide a comprehensive governance framework that enables the Board of Directors to govern the Association effectively while maintaining alignment between long-term strategic priorities and day-to-day organizational operations.

The governance framework functions as a continuous planning and accountability cycle:

- The **Articles of Incorporation** establish the Association's legal authority.
- The **Bylaws** define how the Association is governed.
- The **Strategic Plan** establishes long-term organizational direction.
- The **Annual Work Plan** translates strategic priorities into annual implementation activities.
- The **Board Calendar** organizes recurring governance responsibilities throughout the year.
- The **Performance Measurement Framework** monitors progress and informs organizational decision-making.

- The **Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)** supports coordination by clarifying organizational roles and responsibilities among the Association and its implementation partners.

Together, these documents support effective governance, financial stewardship, strategic planning, organizational accountability, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

C. Maintaining the Governance Framework

The governance framework is intended to evolve as the Association grows. The Board of Directors should periodically review each governance document to ensure it remains consistent with the Association's Mission, organizational priorities, legal requirements, and evolving organizational capacity.

While the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws establish the Association's legal and governance foundation, the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Board Calendar, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), and Performance Measurement Framework should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect organizational growth, implementation progress, and emerging opportunities.

Collectively, these documents provide the governance infrastructure necessary to support responsible organizational leadership, effective decision-making, and the long-term sustainability of both the Rio Grande Trail Association and the Rio Grande Trail.

IX. Conclusion

The Rio Grande Trail Association has been established with the governance framework, organizational structure, strategic direction, and foundational resources necessary to begin operations as the nonprofit partner supporting the Rio Grande Trail. The Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Public Engagement Report, Funding Prospect List, Board Calendar, Annual Work Plan, and Performance Measurement Framework collectively provide the legal, organizational, and strategic foundation for the Association's long-term success.

As the Association grows, the Board of Directors should continue refining these governance tools through annual planning, regular evaluation, and ongoing collaboration with the Rio Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations,

businesses, volunteers, and community partners. Together, these documents provide a flexible governance framework capable of supporting the long-term planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

Recommendations

Based on the work completed during formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association, the following actions are recommended for the inaugural Board of Directors:

1. Adopt the governance documents that establish the Association's legal, strategic, and organizational framework.
2. Review and update the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Board Calendar, Performance Measurement Framework, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) through the Association's annual planning process.
3. Continue strengthening Board leadership, organizational capacity, and long-term sustainability through ongoing governance education, succession planning, and resource development.

X. Supporting Governance Documents

The following documents were prepared as part of formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association and should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report:

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Strategic Plan
- Public Engagement Report
- Board Qualifications
- Board Recruitment Materials (if applicable)
- Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)
- Board Calendar
- Funding Prospect List