

Río Grande Trail Association

Strategic Plan 2026–2030

A Five-Year Roadmap for Corridor Alignment, Coordinated Funding, and Partnerships

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RÍO GRANDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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Adoption

Río Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan (2026–2030)

This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Río Grande Trail Association on _____, 2026. It establishes the Association's strategic direction for the period 2026–2030 and provides the framework for governance, organizational development, annual planning, partnership coordination, fundraising, performance evaluation, and the Association's support of planning, stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail.

Contents

I. Executive Summary	5
Purpose of the Río Grande Trail Association	5
Relationship to the Statewide Río Grande Trail Initiative	5
Strategic Direction	5
Long-Term Vision and Desired Outcomes	6
II. Organizational Foundation	7
A. Mission Statement	7
B. Vision	7
C. Organizational Role and Boundaries	7
What RGTA Does	8
Organizational Boundaries	8
Relationship with Government Partners	9
D. Planning Assumptions	9
E. Guiding Principles	10
III. Strategic Priorities	11
A. Priority 1 — Community Engagement & Partnerships	11
B. Priority 2 — Funding & Organizational Sustainability	11
C. Priority 3 — Trail Completion & Connectivity	13
D. Priority 4 — Stewardship & Volunteer Engagement	15
E. Priority 5 — Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity	16
F. Priority 6 — Communications & Public Awareness	17
G. Priority 7 — Governance & Organizational Development	17
Governance Philosophy	18
Governance Outcomes	18
Board Leadership	18
Organizational Governance	19
Financial Stewardship, Compliance & Risk Management	19

Organizational Performance & Continuous Improvement	20
IV. Organizational Growth & Implementation Roadmap	21
A. Organizational Growth Strategy	21
Phase A – Organizational Startup (2026–2027)	21
Phase B – Organizational Growth (2027–2029)	21
Phase C – Organizational Maturity (2030 and Beyond)	22
B. Implementation Timeline	22
Year 0.5 (2026) Establish the Organization	22
Year 1 (2027) Build Organizational Capacity	23
Year 2 (2028) Expand Programs and Partnerships	23
Years 3–4 (2029–2030) Sustain and Institutionalize	24
C. Annual Work Planning	24
D. Board Work Plan	24
Monthly Recurring Commitments	25
Annual Governance Cycle Tasks	25
E. Regional Implementation Approach	27
Northern Region – Traditional Partnerships, Cultural Landscapes, and Historic Communities (Taos, Río Arriba, Santa Fe)	27
Central Region – Urban Connectivity, Public Access, and Community Engage- ment (Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, Socorro)	28
Southern Region – Rural Communities, Conservation, and Economic Opportu- nity (Sierra, Doña Ana)	28
V. Funding & Financial Strategy	29
A. Revenue Sources	29
B. Funding Strategy by Organizational Phase	29
C. Financial Sustainability	30
VI. Communications & Public Engagement Strategy	31
VII. Organizational Success Measures	32

VIII. Supporting Documents	33
IX. Appendix: Performance Measurement Framework	34

I. Executive Summary

Purpose of the Río Grande Trail Association

The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization established to support the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the 500-mile Río Grande Trail. Working alongside the Río Grande Trail Commission, public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities, the RGTA helps build the organizational capacity, financial resources, partnerships, volunteer support, and public engagement needed to advance the trail over time.

The Río Grande Trail represents a monumental investment in outdoor recreation, conservation, rural economic development, cultural heritage, public health, transportation connectivity, tourism, and quality of life for New Mexico.

The RGTA does not exercise regulatory or land management authority. Instead, it complements the work of governmental agencies and partner organizations by providing fundraising, coordination, community engagement, stewardship, education, communications, and other organizational support that advances shared trail objectives.

Relationship to the Statewide Río Grande Trail Initiative

The Río Grande Trail is a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional initiative involving federal, state, Tribal, regional, and local governments; land managers; nonprofit organizations; businesses; and community partners. Trail designation, land access, environmental review, construction, management, and formal government-to-government consultation remain the responsibility of the appropriate governmental entities and sovereign governments.

Within this framework, the RGTA serves as the nonprofit partner that helps coordinate partnerships, mobilize resources, strengthen public support, and maintain long-term organizational momentum across jurisdictions and changing administrations. By connecting public agencies, private philanthropy, volunteers, and communities, the Association helps translate statewide priorities into locally supported initiatives that advance the long-term vision of the Río Grande Trail.

Strategic Direction

Over the next five years, the RGTA will focus on seven strategic priorities:

1. Community Engagement & Partnerships
2. Funding & Organizational Sustainability

3. Trail Completion & Connectivity
4. Stewardship, Volunteers & Maintenance
5. Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity
6. Communications & Public Awareness
7. Governance & Organizational Development

Implementation will occur through a regional approach that recognizes the unique cultural, environmental, and community characteristics of northern, central, and southern New Mexico. Organizational growth will be intentional and financially responsible, transitioning from a volunteer-led startup organization to one supported by professional staff and specialized technical expertise as funding and organizational capacity allow.

Long-Term Vision and Desired Outcomes

Through implementation of this Strategic Plan, the RGTA seeks to achieve the following long-term outcomes:

- **A Connected Corridor (Segment Identification & Acceptance):** The systematic identification and official acceptance of trail segments by the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC), establishing a verified and approved 500-mile corridor blueprint. While the physical development of a fully safe, navigable, and clearly marked trail outside of vehicular lanes will require significant infrastructure funding and span many years, this NPO-driven alignment baseline legally and geographically validates the route.
- **Trusted Relationships:** Establish respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, landowners, and communities while supporting collaborative trail planning and implementation.
- **A Culture of Stewardship:** Foster a statewide network of volunteers, community organizations, youth conservation programs, and stewardship partners committed to the long-term care and sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.
- **Economic and Community Benefits:** Support gateway communities and rural economies by promoting responsible recreation, heritage tourism, conservation, public health, education, cultural appreciation, and community connectivity while protecting natural resources, working landscapes, and cultural heritage.

Success will be measured not only by progress toward a connected trail corridor, but also by the strength of partnerships, community trust, organizational sustainability, stewardship, and the long-term public benefits created for New Mexico.

II. Organizational Foundation

A. Mission Statement

Mission: The Río Grande Trail Association supports the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Río Grande Trail for the benefit of New Mexico's communities, landscapes, and cultures.

Purpose: The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the planning, development, stewardship, and long-term success of the Río Grande Trail. Through fundraising, partnerships, public engagement, stewardship, education, and organizational capacity building, the RGTA works alongside public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities to help create a continuous trail corridor that provides recreational, educational, environmental, cultural, and economic benefits throughout New Mexico.

Commitment: The RGTA is committed to advancing the Río Grande Trail through collaborative partnerships, responsible stewardship, public education, and meaningful community engagement. The Association seeks to build respectful, lasting relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while working collaboratively with acequia associations, land grants, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, residents, and other community partners to help ensure the trail reflects and benefits the diverse communities it serves.

B. Vision

The Río Grande Trail will be a continuous 500-mile trail corridor that celebrates New Mexico's diverse landscapes, cultures, and history while promoting recreation, stewardship, education, and community connections. Through collaboration among public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities, the trail will enhance access to outdoor recreation, support conservation, strengthen local economies, and contribute to the quality of life for residents and visitors throughout New Mexico.

C. Organizational Role and Boundaries

The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization established to increase the organizational capacity, financial resources, public understanding, community participation, and long-term stewardship needed to advance the Río Grande Trail. The Association complements the work of the Río Grande Trail Commission, state agencies, Tribal Nations, Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners by providing fundraising, coordination, public engagement, stewardship, education, communications, and other organizational support.

For purposes of this Strategic Plan, “partner organizations” refers to nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, businesses, community organizations, volunteers, and other non-governmental entities that collaborate with the Association. References to governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, land managers, and local governments are identified separately where relevant.

What RGTA Does

The RGTA supports the Río Grande Trail by:

- Convening and coordinating partners and supporting collaboration across jurisdictions.
- Raising public, private, and philanthropic funding.
- Assisting with grant development and resource coordination.
- Supporting public engagement, education, and community-informed planning.
- Organizing authorized volunteer stewardship and maintenance activities.
- Developing educational materials, communications, and trail identity resources.
- Advocating through lawful, nonpartisan activities for investment in the Río Grande Trail.
- Providing administrative, technical, and project support when requested by partner organizations.

Organizational Boundaries

The RGTA does not independently:

- Designate trail routes or authorize public access.
- Exercise regulatory or land management authority over public, private, Tribal, or sovereign lands.
- Acquire trail access without the express authorization of the appropriate landowner or managing entity.
- Approve environmental reviews, construction projects, trail closures, or land management decisions.
- Deploy volunteers or conduct activities on lands without appropriate authorization.
- Conduct formal government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations or Pueblos.

- Represent the views of Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, landowners, communities, or governmental entities without their authorization.
- Replace or assume the statutory responsibilities of the Río Grande Trail Commission, state agencies, local governments, sovereign governments, land managers, or other partner organizations.

Relationship with Government Partners

The RGTA works collaboratively with the Río Grande Trail Commission, the Outdoor Recreation Division, State Parks Division, federal agencies, Tribal Nations, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, and community partners. Through regular communication, collaboration, and formal agreements where appropriate, the Association helps build organizational capacity, public support, financial resources, and long-term momentum for the Río Grande Trail while respecting the authorities and responsibilities of each partner.

D. Planning Assumptions

Successful implementation of this Strategic Plan is based on several assumptions that support the successful development and long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail Association. These assumptions should be reviewed annually as part of the Board's strategic planning and annual work planning process and revised as organizational conditions evolve.

The Strategic Plan assumes:

- Continued collaboration with the Río Grande Trail Commission, Outdoor Recreation Division, State Parks Division, Tribal Nations, Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and other partner organizations.
- Continued progress toward implementation of the Río Grande Trail through coordination among governmental agencies, land managers, communities, and partner organizations.
- Continued availability of public, philanthropic, corporate, and individual funding necessary to support organizational priorities and sustainable growth.
- Successful establishment and continued development of the RGTA's Board of Directors, governance systems, financial controls, policies, and organizational capacity.
- Continued community engagement and relationship-building with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, local governments, landowners, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and residents.
- That trail designation, land management, environmental review, regulatory authority, and formal government-to-government consultation remain the responsibility of the appropriate governmental entities, sovereign governments, and land managers.

- The Association’s role is to complement these responsibilities by providing organizational capacity, fundraising, stewardship, education, communications, advocacy, partnership development, and community engagement.
- Organizational growth, staffing, and program expansion will occur as financial capacity allows and will be paced to maintain the long-term sustainability of the organization.

E. Guiding Principles

- **Community-Centered Planning:** Support community-centered planning by considering local quality of life, safety, cultural values, and economic opportunities while balancing regional recreation and tourism objectives.
- **Respect for Tribal and Traditional Historic Communities:** The RGTA recognizes the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and respects the historic rights, responsibilities, and traditions of acequia associations and land grants. The Association will support the state’s formal, government-to-government tribal consultation tracks and engage through the processes and protocols identified by each sovereign government or organization while supporting respectful, long-term relationships built on trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding.
- **Stewardship and Sustainability:** The RGTA will encourage planning and stewardship practices that minimize environmental impacts, protect wildlife habitat, and support sustainable long-term maintenance through collaborative partnerships, volunteer engagement, and responsible resource management.
- **Collaboration and Partnership:** The Río Grande Trail depends on strong partnerships, shared leadership, coordinated resources, and collaborative agreements among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and local communities.
- **Education and Interpretation:** The Río Grande Trail serves as a living classroom that fosters appreciation for New Mexico’s geological, ecological, cultural, and historical landscapes through thoughtful interpretation, education, and storytelling.
- **Access and Connectivity:** The RGTA supports equitable access to outdoor recreation by encouraging safe, welcoming, and accessible connections to the Río Grande Trail for communities throughout New Mexico, including rural, unincorporated, and underserved areas.
- **Economic and Community Benefit:** The RGTA supports responsible recreation and trail-related economic opportunities that strengthen local businesses, contribute to rural economies, enhance quality of life, and help protect the character, cultural heritage, and long-term vitality of New Mexico’s communities.

III. Strategic Priorities

A. Priority 1 — Community Engagement & Partnerships

Goal: Build respectful, collaborative, and lasting partnerships that support planning, development, stewardship, and long-term success of the Río Grande Trail.

- **Build and Maintain Strategic Partnerships:** Develop and strengthen relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and landowners to advance shared trail objectives.
- **Support Community-Informed Planning:** Facilitate community engagement activities that encourage local participation, gather input, identify opportunities, and build support for trail planning and implementation while respecting local priorities and decision-making processes.
- **Promote Regional Collaboration:** Support regional coordination among communities and partner organizations to address local opportunities, challenges, and implementation priorities throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- **Encourage Volunteer and Community Participation:** Create opportunities for residents, organizations, and businesses to participate in stewardship, planning, fundraising, advocacy, and other activities that strengthen long-term community ownership of the trail.
- **Support Collaborative Problem Solving:** Foster open communication, mutual respect, and collaborative approaches that help address concerns, build trust, and strengthen long-term partnerships.

B. Priority 2 — Funding & Organizational Sustainability

Goal: Build a resilient and diversified funding base that provides long-term organizational stability while supporting trail development, stewardship, education, and community engagement initiatives throughout the corridor.

- **Develop Long-Term Fundraising Strategy:** Create a comprehensive fundraising framework that combines public grants, philanthropic investments, corporate sponsorships, memberships, and individual giving. Establish annual fundraising targets aligned with organizational growth and trail implementation priorities.
- **Coordinate Public Funding and Legislative Support:** Develop an annual legislative and public funding strategy that identifies priorities, funding opportunities, and advocacy activities. Legislative engagement may be undertaken directly by the Board or in

collaboration with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations, as appropriate.

- **Support Economic Impact and Return-on-Investment Analysis:** Develop and communicate information demonstrating the economic, recreational, environmental, cultural, and public health benefits of the Río Grande Trail. Support development of economic impact analyses, visitor use information, volunteer value, community benefits, and other performance measures that strengthen grant applications, legislative funding requests, and public investment decisions.
- **Pursue Grants, Sponsorships, Donations, and Partnerships:** Actively identify and pursue grants from federal and state programs, foundations, outdoor recreation partners, conservation organizations, and private donors. Develop sponsorships and strategic partnerships that leverage both financial and in-kind support to advance organizational and trail-related priorities.
- **Build Donor and Membership Programs:** Establish membership and donor programs that create recurring revenue while fostering a statewide community of trail supporters. Develop stewardship-focused giving opportunities that connect contributors directly to trail projects and regional initiatives.
- **Support Funding Coordination for Statewide Trail Priorities:** Work collaboratively with public agencies, local governments, and implementation partners to identify funding needs, coordinate grant pursuits, and align philanthropic investments with statewide trail priorities and community-driven projects.

C. Priority 3 — Trail Completion & Connectivity

Goal: Support the planning, designation, connectivity, and long-term implementation of a continuous Río Grande Trail through collaboration, technical assistance, community engagement, and coordinated partnerships.

Under this Strategic Plan, trail connectivity and completion are viewed as two complementary phases that involve different organizational roles and responsibilities:

- **Phase 1 – Planning, Evaluation, and Designation:** Support collaborative planning, route evaluation, mapping, public engagement, partnership development, and other activities that assist governmental agencies, the Río Grande Trail Commission, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations in identifying opportunities to improve trail connectivity and advance trail designation.
- **Phase 2 – Implementation and Construction:** Support implementation through fundraising, volunteer engagement, stewardship, communications, partnership coordination, and other activities that complement the work of governmental agencies, land managers, and partner organizations as trail projects advance, consistent with available funding, applicable approvals, and organizational capacity.

The RGTA implements this priority through the following tasks:

- **Support Trail Planning and Connectivity:** Work collaboratively with the Río Grande Trail Commission, EMNRD, federal agencies, Tribal Nations, local governments, and partner organizations to provide GIS alignment baselines, route evaluation, and coordination that improves legal segment designations.
- **Facilitate Strategic Trail Priorities:** Support the identification of priority trail segments, connectivity opportunities, implementation challenges, and funding needs in collaboration with governmental agencies and partner organizations. Assist in coordinating resources and partnerships that help advance statewide trail priorities over time.
- **Support Community-Informed Trail Development:** Encourage community participation throughout trail planning and implementation by facilitating public engagement, sharing information, identifying local opportunities and concerns, and supporting collaborative solutions that reflect community values while respecting property rights, cultural resources, and the responsibilities of governmental agencies and sovereign governments.
- **Promote Consistency Across the Trail Corridor:** Support the development of consistent trail identity, wayfinding, mapping, visitor information, and implementation guidance that enhance the user experience while recognizing the unique character, cultural heritage, and environmental conditions of communities throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.

- **Strengthen Technical and Organizational Capacity:** Support collaborative planning, mapping, grant development, data management, project coordination, and resource sharing that help governmental agencies and partner organizations advance trail planning, stewardship, and implementation priorities throughout New Mexico.
- **Measure Progress Toward Trail Completion:** Monitor progress toward trail connectivity, designation, planning, implementation, and partnership development through the Association’s Performance Measurement Framework. Use performance information to inform organizational priorities, strengthen funding proposals, and support coordinated implementation efforts.

D. Priority 4 — Stewardship & Volunteer Engagement

Goal: Foster a statewide culture of stewardship by engaging volunteers, strengthening community partnerships, supporting responsible trail care, and promoting the long-term sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.

- **Develop Volunteer Stewardship Programs:** Establish and expand volunteer opportunities that encourage long-term community involvement in caring for the Río Grande Trail. Programs may include Adopt-a-Segment initiatives, youth conservation and service-learning projects, volunteer trail crews, community stewardship events, and regional volunteer leadership opportunities.
- **Support Authorized Trail Stewardship:** Coordinate authorized stewardship, maintenance, restoration, cleanup, monitoring, and resource protection activities in partnership with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, land managers, local governments, and other partner organizations. All stewardship activities will be conducted with the appropriate permissions and in accordance with applicable land management policies and agreements.
- **Build Community Stewardship:** Encourage residents, businesses, schools, civic organizations, and community groups to take an active role in protecting and enhancing the Río Grande Trail. Support recurring stewardship events, local leadership, and volunteer participation that foster long-term community ownership and care of the trail.
- **Strengthen Stewardship Partnerships:** Collaborate with governmental agencies, conservation organizations, educational institutions, outdoor recreation organizations, businesses, and community partners to expand volunteer capacity, leverage technical expertise, coordinate stewardship initiatives, and maximize the impact of available resources.
- **Promote Responsible Trail Use:** Support responsible recreation by encouraging respect for natural resources, cultural heritage, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, private property, acequia systems, working agricultural lands, wildlife, and neighboring communities through volunteer engagement and educational initiatives consistent with the Association's Communications and Public Awareness Strategy.
- **Recognize Stewardship Contributions:** Celebrate volunteer service, stewardship accomplishments, and community leadership through the Association's communications, public awareness, and recognition programs to encourage continued participation and strengthen a culture of stewardship throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- **Measure Stewardship Success:** Evaluate stewardship efforts through volunteer participation, stewardship events, partner engagement, trail care activities, resource improvements, and other performance measures identified in the Performance Measurement Framework. Use these results to continuously improve stewardship programs and strengthen long-term organizational capacity.

E. Priority 5 — Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity

Goal: Develop a recognizable and respectful trail identity that promotes understanding of the Río Grande Trail while celebrating New Mexico's diverse landscapes, cultures, history, and communities.

- **Develop a Unified Trail Identity:** Support the development and consistent use of branding and visual identity materials that strengthen public recognition of the Río Grande Trail while reflecting the unique character of New Mexico and its communities.
- **Promote Interpretation and Education:** Collaborate with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, educational institutions, historians, cultural organizations, and partner organizations to develop interpretive and educational resources that increase public understanding of the trail's natural, cultural, historical, recreational, and environmental significance.
- **Support Place-Based Learning:** Encourage educational opportunities that use the Río Grande Trail as an outdoor classroom for environmental stewardship, conservation, cultural heritage, recreation, public health, and community history while supporting educational programming for residents, schools, youth organizations, and visitors.
- **Promote Consistent Visitor Information:** Support the development of maps, interpretive materials, educational resources, and wayfinding guidance that improve visitor understanding, encourage responsible recreation, and strengthen the overall trail experience in coordination with governmental agencies and partner organizations.
- **Celebrate Community Identity:** Promote the stories, traditions, landscapes, cultures, and communities that define the Río Grande Trail while ensuring interpretation reflects multiple perspectives and is developed in collaboration with the appropriate governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historians, cultural organizations, and local communities.

F. Priority 6 — Communications & Public Awareness

Goal: Increase public awareness, strengthen community engagement, and build broad public support for the Río Grande Trail through coordinated communications, education, transparency, and storytelling.

- **Develop a Coordinated Communications Program:** Implement a comprehensive communications strategy that supports the Association’s Mission through consistent branding, digital communications, media relations, publications, photography, storytelling, and public information resources.
- **Strengthen Public Awareness:** Promote statewide understanding of the Río Grande Trail by communicating its recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, economic, and public health benefits while highlighting opportunities for public participation, stewardship, and volunteer involvement.
- **Support Community Engagement:** Provide timely, transparent, and accessible information that encourages meaningful public participation in trail planning, stewardship activities, organizational initiatives, and community partnerships consistent with the Association’s community engagement goals.
- **Promote Responsible Recreation:** Develop educational campaigns and visitor information that encourage safe and responsible trail use, including Leave No Trace principles, “Good Neighbor” guidance, agricultural awareness, cultural respect, outdoor safety, and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- **Tell the Story of the Río Grande Trail:** Share stories that celebrate the landscapes, communities, cultures, volunteers, and partnerships that contribute to the Río Grande Trail while recognizing the contributions of Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and local communities.
- **Maintain Organizational Transparency:** Provide regular updates regarding organizational activities, Board actions, Strategic Plan implementation, funding, partnerships, stewardship accomplishments, and organizational performance through annual reports, newsletters, digital communications, public meetings, and other appropriate communication channels.

G. Priority 7 — Governance & Organizational Development

Goal: Establish a strong, representative, and sustainable governance structure that provides effective leadership, accountability, financial stewardship, and organizational capacity to support the long-term planning, development, stewardship, and sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.

Governance Philosophy

The Río Grande Trail Association is committed to governance practices that promote transparency, accountability, collaboration, ethical leadership, and responsible stewardship of organizational resources. The Board of Directors will govern in a manner consistent with the Association's Mission, strategic priorities, fiduciary responsibilities, and long-term sustainability while fostering an organizational culture built on trust, respect, inclusiveness, and informed decision-making.

The Board will:

- Conduct its work in a transparent, ethical, and accountable manner.
- Foster collaboration among Board members, partner organizations, volunteers, and the communities served by the Association.
- Exercise sound fiscal stewardship and prudent oversight of organizational resources.
- Make decisions informed by available data, community input, partner collaboration, organizational priorities, and applicable legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
- Regularly evaluate organizational performance and progress toward strategic goals.
- Review the Strategic Plan annually and adjust organizational priorities in response to changing conditions, opportunities, funding availability, and community needs.

The Strategic Plan will serve as the Board's primary long-range planning document and will be implemented through annual work plans, budgets, and performance measures that support continuous organizational improvement.

Governance Outcomes

Effective governance provides the leadership, accountability, strategic direction, financial stewardship, and organizational continuity necessary to advance the Río Grande Trail and sustain the Association over the long term. Through responsible governance, the Board will ensure the RGTA remains mission-focused, financially resilient, and accountable to its partners, supporters, and the communities it serves.

Board members are expected to actively support the Association through strategic leadership, fiduciary oversight, fundraising, community engagement, ambassadorial leadership, and participation in Board and committee activities.

Board Leadership

- **Build and Sustain Representative Board Leadership:** Recruit, develop, and retain a diverse Board of Directors that reflects the geographic, cultural, professional, and commu-

nity interests represented along the Río Grande Trail corridor. Seek expertise in outdoor recreation, conservation, fundraising, finance, law, communications, public administration, Tribal relations, and community development while maintaining representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico.

- **Develop Leadership Capacity and Continuity:** Establish effective officer leadership, committee leadership, Board recruitment, onboarding, continuing education, leadership succession, and Board evaluation practices that support sound governance, institutional knowledge, and long-term organizational effectiveness.

Organizational Governance

- **Establish Governance Systems:** Develop governance policies, committee charters, advisory groups, working groups, and organizational procedures that clearly define roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and communication pathways through the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) framework and other governance tools. These systems will support effective leadership, collaboration, accountability, and implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- **Build Organizational Capacity and Resilience:** Develop the organizational systems, administrative infrastructure, technology, financial management practices, and human resources necessary to support long-term organizational effectiveness. Determine staffing priorities and engage employees, contractors, consultants, and volunteers as organizational needs and financial capacity evolve while maintaining financial sustainability and mission focus.

Financial Stewardship, Compliance & Risk Management

- **Exercise Financial Stewardship:** Fulfill the Board's fiduciary responsibilities through responsible financial oversight, sound budgeting, diversified resource development, internal controls, and long-term financial planning that supports organizational sustainability.
- **Maintain Compliance and Organizational Integrity:** Regularly review and update policies related to nonprofit compliance, ethics, conflicts of interest, records management, reporting requirements, transparency, and accountability to maintain public trust and organizational integrity.
- **Manage Organizational Risk:** Identify, evaluate, and proactively manage operational, financial, legal, reputational, partnership, and organizational risks through regular policy review, strategic planning, and Board oversight.

Organizational Performance & Continuous Improvement

- **Monitor Organizational Performance:** Regularly review progress toward the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, financial objectives, governance effectiveness, and organizational performance measures. Use evaluation results to strengthen decision-making, improve organizational effectiveness, and guide future planning.

IV. Organizational Growth & Implementation Roadmap

A. Organizational Growth Strategy

Organizational growth will occur deliberately and in proportion to available financial resources, organizational capacity, and implementation priorities. Growth decisions will be guided by organizational readiness, financial sustainability, partner needs, and the Association's ability to deliver high-quality programs and services.

To scale the Association responsibly from its current state to a mature, stable nonprofit, the Board will execute a three-phase growth strategy keyed to funding benchmarks:

Phase A – Organizational Startup (2026–2027)

Purpose: Establish the organizational foundation needed to begin implementing the Strategic Plan.

Primary Focus:

- Establish governance and administrative systems.
- Adopt organizational policies and annual work plans.
- Build partnerships and organizational visibility.
- Launch initial fundraising and communications.
- Develop the organization's operational capacity.

Key Milestone: The organization has established governance systems, secured initial funding, and is prepared to expand its capacity through professional support.

Phase B – Organizational Growth (2027–2029)

Purpose: Expand the organization's capacity to support statewide implementation.

Primary Focus:

- Strengthen fundraising and communications.
- Expand partnerships and volunteer programs.
- Utilize professional contractors and consultants as needed.
- Evaluate staffing needs as organizational capacity and funding allow.
- Support implementation of strategic priorities.

Key Milestone: The organization has established stable funding, expanded partnerships, and sufficient operational capacity to support long-term growth.

Phase C – Organizational Maturity (2030 and Beyond)

Purpose: Sustain a mature statewide nonprofit organization supporting the Río Grande Trail.

Primary Focus:

- Maintain professional organizational capacity.
- Strengthen governance and financial sustainability.
- Coordinate statewide stewardship and partnerships.
- Support long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail.
- Continuously evaluate and improve organizational performance.

B. Implementation Timeline

The Board of Directors will adopt and annually update a rolling three-year implementation plan to guide the execution of this Strategic Plan. The implementation plan will establish annual priorities, organizational milestones, and key initiatives that advance the Strategic Plan through annual work plans, budgets, fundraising objectives, partnership initiatives, and organizational capacity-building activities.

Implementation will build upon the governance documents, GIS resources, partner relationships, volunteer networks, funding resources, and other organizational assets developed during the Association’s formation. These resources provide the foundation for organizational growth, fundraising, partnership development, and statewide trail implementation.

Year 0.5 (2026) Establish the Organization

Focus: Build the governance, administrative, and financial foundation needed to launch the Association.

Key Milestones:

- Establish the Board of Directors, elect officers, adopt the Strategic Plan, and approve the initial governance structure.
- Develop the 2027 Annual Work Plan, Board calendar, committee structure, and organizational priorities.

- Establish financial management, banking, accounting, insurance, technology, donor management, and other core administrative systems.
- Determine staffing priorities and engage professional services as needed to support organizational development.
- Launch initial fundraising efforts, pursue public funding opportunities, and begin grant development.
- Establish working relationships with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations supporting trail planning and implementation.

Year 1 (2027) Build Organizational Capacity

Focus: Implement the Strategic Plan while strengthening organizational systems, partnerships, fundraising, and public engagement.

Key Milestones:

- Implement the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.
- Continue building organizational capacity consistent with Priority 7 by strengthening Board leadership, governance systems, committees, advisory groups, and operational infrastructure.
- Strengthen fundraising, communications, membership, and grant development efforts.
- Expand partnerships that support trail planning, stewardship, education, and community engagement.
- Launch volunteer and stewardship programs while establishing organizational performance reporting.

Year 2 (2028) Expand Programs and Partnerships

Focus: Increase statewide capacity, deepen partnerships, and expand program delivery.

Key Milestones:

- Continue implementing Strategic Priorities 1–7 through the Annual Work Plan.
- Continue expanding organizational capacity consistent with Priority 7 through regional leadership, staffing, technical expertise, and organizational systems as funding and organizational needs evolve.
- Strengthen fundraising through grants, sponsorships, memberships, donor cultivation, and collaborative funding initiatives.

- Expand volunteer stewardship, youth engagement, education, communications, and community outreach.
- Support priority trail planning, stewardship, and implementation projects in partnership with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Years 3–4 (2029–2030) Sustain and Institutionalize

Focus: Position the RGTA as the long-term nonprofit partner supporting the Río Grande Trail.

Key Milestones:

- Maintain a diversified funding portfolio, financial reserves, and sustainable organizational systems.
- Continue implementing Priority 7 by strengthening Board leadership, governance, organizational resilience, succession planning, and performance evaluation.
- Maintain long-term partnerships with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners.
- Continue supporting trail planning, stewardship, education, public engagement, and implementation throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- Evaluate progress, update the Strategic Plan, and strengthen the Association's long-term organizational capacity and statewide leadership.

C. Annual Work Planning

The RGTA will translate the Strategic Plan into an Annual Work Plan that identifies specific objectives, implementation activities, responsible parties, timelines, performance measures, and annual budget priorities. The Board of Directors will review and approve the Annual Work Plan each year, generally in conjunction with the annual budget, to ensure organizational efforts remain aligned with strategic priorities, emerging opportunities, funding availability, and statewide trail implementation needs.

D. Board Work Plan

The following calendar provides an illustrative annual governance cycle for the Board of Directors. It is intended to guide recurring governance, strategic planning, partnership coordination, fundraising, budgeting, legislative engagement, and organizational oversight activities. The Board may modify the timing of these activities as organizational needs evolve.

The Board will use governance policies, committee charters, annual work plans, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) framework to clarify organizational roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and coordination among the Board of Directors, committees, staff, contractors, volunteers, the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and other partner organizations.

Monthly Recurring Commitments

Coordinate regularly with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations to:

- Review action items from previous Board meetings.
- Align organizational and implementation priorities.
- Share progress, opportunities, and emerging issues.
- Coordinate funding, stewardship, and partnership initiatives.
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and areas of collaboration using the RACI framework and other governance tools.
- Identify opportunities to advance trail planning, stewardship, education, public engagement, and implementation.

Each Board meeting should include:

- Financial report and budget review.
- Resource development update (grants, public funding, sponsorships, memberships, and donor development).
- Partnership, implementation, and organizational capacity update.
- Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan progress review.
- Organizational status and implementation update provided by the Executive Director, staff, contractors, or a Board officer, as applicable.

Annual Governance Cycle Tasks

- **January:** Confirm annual Board goals, committee priorities, and monitor legislative activity.
- **February:** Monitor legislative priorities and public funding opportunities.
- **March:** Begin Board recruitment and succession planning; prepare for IRS Form 990 filing.

- **April:** Review organizational compliance requirements and approve IRS Form 990.
- **May:** Complete the annual Board self-assessment and governance review; conduct staff performance evaluation(s) (if applicable).
- **June:** Conduct the annual strategic planning session; review Strategic Plan progress and performance measures; confirm organizational priorities, legislative priorities, and organizational capacity needs.
- **July:** Coordinate with the Río Grande Trail Commission and partner organizations to prepare legislative requests, funding strategies, and supporting materials.
- **August:** Engage legislators, state agencies, and partners to advance legislative priorities and public funding opportunities.
- **September:** Continue legislative coordination and begin development of the following year's Annual Work Plan, budget, and organizational priorities.
- **October:** Finalize the draft Annual Work Plan and proposed operating budget; review partnership agreements and coordination priorities.
- **November:** Approve legislative priorities, the Annual Work Plan, and annual budget; elect officers and appoint committees for the coming year.
- **December:** Review annual accomplishments and organizational performance; prepare the Annual Report and finalize implementation plans for the upcoming year.

E. Regional Implementation Approach

Recognizing the geographic, cultural, ecological, and organizational diversity of the Río Grande Trail, the RGTA will implement this Strategic Plan through regionally tailored approaches that reflect local priorities, opportunities, partnerships, and implementation needs. While the Association will pursue a unified statewide vision, successful implementation will depend upon building relationships and supporting locally appropriate solutions throughout the trail corridor.

Northern Region – Traditional Partnerships, Cultural Landscapes, and Historic Communities (Taos, Río Arriba, Santa Fe)

The northern region includes the greatest concentration of Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historic acequia communities, land grants, and culturally significant landscapes along the Río Grande corridor.

Successful implementation will emphasize relationship-building, trust, and long-term collaboration while respecting tribal sovereignty, traditional agricultural communities, cultural resources, and locally identified priorities. The RGTA will support community engagement, partnership development, stewardship, interpretation, and trail planning efforts that reflect the unique cultural heritage and governance structures of northern New Mexico.

The RGTA's engagement approach recognizes the distinct roles, responsibilities, and relationships associated with Tribal Nations and Pueblos and with Acequia Associations and Land Grants:

- **Tribal Nations and Pueblos:** The RGTA does not conduct or initiate government-to-government consultation, which remains the responsibility of the appropriate governmental agencies. When requested and appropriate, the Association may support relationship-building, public education, partnership development, and other collaborative activities that complement agency-led engagement. The Association respects Tribal sovereignty and cultural resources and recognizes that governmental agencies and land managers may implement temporary trail management measures, including trail closures where appropriate, to protect culturally sensitive areas and ceremonial activities.
- **Acequia Associations and Land Grants:** Engagement with Acequia Associations and Land Grants emphasizes relationship-building, collaboration, and voluntary partnership agreements, as appropriate, to help protect acequia infrastructure, water delivery systems, private property rights, agricultural operations, and continued maintenance access while advancing shared trail objectives.

Central Region – Urban Connectivity, Public Access, and Community Engagement (Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, Socorro)

The central region serves as the population center of New Mexico and provides significant opportunities to expand public access, connect existing trail systems, and increase public awareness of the Río Grande Trail.

Implementation will focus on strengthening partnerships with local governments, public agencies, community organizations, educational institutions, and recreation partners to improve connectivity, promote active transportation and outdoor recreation, support stewardship and volunteerism, and engage diverse urban and suburban communities in the long-term success of the trail.

Southern Region – Rural Communities, Conservation, and Economic Opportunity (Sierra, Doña Ana)

The southern region encompasses extensive rural landscapes, working agricultural lands, public lands, and internationally significant wildlife habitat.

Trail development will require strong collaboration with land managers, agricultural communities, conservation organizations, local governments, and regional partners to balance recreation, resource protection, and private property interests.

Implementation will emphasize stewardship, conservation, community-based tourism, rural economic development, and expanded recreational opportunities while recognizing the unique environmental, cultural, and logistical challenges of southern New Mexico.

Conservation equity will be prioritized by partnering with groups like Nuestra Tierra to build direct, walkable river trail access for unincorporated communities and colonias, providing a direct recreational and transportation utility to multigenerational families living alongside the corridor.

V. Funding & Financial Strategy

The RGTA will pursue a diversified funding strategy that combines public funding, philanthropic support, corporate partnerships, memberships, sponsorships, individual giving, events, and other earned and in-kind revenue opportunities. As the organization grows, its funding strategy will evolve to support statewide trail planning, stewardship, education, community engagement, and long-term organizational sustainability.

A. Revenue Sources

1. **Public Grants and Appropriations:** Pursue federal, state, regional, and local grants, legislative appropriations, and other public funding opportunities that support trail planning, development, stewardship, conservation, recreation, education, and community engagement. Initial efforts will emphasize New Mexico-based funding opportunities while expanding to larger state and federal programs as organizational capacity grows.
2. **Philanthropic and Individual Giving:** Cultivate relationships with foundations, family philanthropies, major donors, and individual supporters whose interests align with outdoor recreation, conservation, cultural heritage, public access, youth engagement, community development, and rural economic vitality.
3. **Corporate Partnerships, Sponsorships, and Memberships:** Develop sponsorships, memberships, and strategic partnerships with businesses, tourism partners, financial institutions, utilities, and outdoor recreation organizations that support healthy communities and trail-related initiatives while creating recurring revenue and long-term public investment in the Río Grande Trail.
4. **Events, Campaigns, and In-Kind Support:** Conduct fundraising events, stewardship initiatives, educational campaigns, and volunteer programs that increase public engagement while generating financial and in-kind support through donated services, materials, equipment, technical assistance, and volunteer labor.

B. Funding Strategy by Organizational Phase

- **Phase A – Board-Led Resource Development:** Establish the organization's fundraising systems, annual fundraising strategy, case for support, donor management processes, and funding calendar while pursuing startup funding through memberships, donations, sponsorships, community foundations, grants, local businesses, and legislative relationship-building.
- **Phase B – Foundation and Grant Expansion:** Expand fundraising through larger foundation grants, statewide sponsorships, public funding opportunities, and major donor cultivation while strengthening grant writing, communications, and resource development capacity through professional support as needed.

- **Phase C – Long-Term Implementation Funding:** Support large-scale trail planning, development, stewardship, restoration, education, and community initiatives through coordinated state and federal funding, multi-partner grant proposals, philanthropic investments, and collaborative funding strategies with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

C. Financial Sustainability

The RGTA will maintain a diversified, multi-year funding portfolio to reduce reliance on any single revenue source and strengthen long-term organizational resilience. The Board of Directors will annually review fundraising priorities, funding prospects, and application schedules to ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan, organizational capacity, partnership opportunities, and project readiness.

As the organization matures, the RGTA will establish financial reserves, sound financial management practices, internal controls, and organizational systems that support responsible stewardship of resources, compliance with nonprofit standards, and long-term organizational sustainability. The Association may engage qualified financial, accounting, auditing, or other professional services as needed to support effective financial management and organizational growth.

VI. Communications & Public Engagement Strategy

The Río Grande Trail Association will implement a coordinated communications and public engagement strategy that strengthens public awareness, builds community support, promotes responsible recreation, and advances implementation of the Strategic Plan. Communications will foster transparency, encourage meaningful public participation, strengthen relationships with governmental agencies and partner organizations, and celebrate the people, landscapes, cultures, and communities that define the Río Grande Trail.

- **Branding and Messaging:** Develop and maintain a consistent visual identity and messaging framework that reflects the Association's Mission, values, and strategic priorities while promoting recognition of the Río Grande Trail throughout New Mexico. Communications will emphasize stewardship, collaboration, respect for cultural and natural resources, community partnerships, and the long-term public benefits of the trail.
- **Digital Communications:** Maintain an accessible and informative website and digital communications program that provides current information regarding trail planning, organizational activities, volunteer opportunities, stewardship initiatives, public meetings, funding opportunities, educational resources, and organizational performance. Digital resources should support transparency, public engagement, and informed participation.
- **Education and Public Information:** Develop educational resources that increase public understanding of the Río Grande Trail, responsible recreation, stewardship practices, outdoor safety, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation. Educational materials may include Good Neighbor Guides, Leave No Trace information, visitor resources, interpretive content, maps, and other materials that encourage responsible trail use and respect for neighboring communities, working landscapes, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia systems, and cultural resources.
- **Storytelling and Interpretation:** Promote the stories, history, cultures, landscapes, and communities that shape the Río Grande Trail through photography, publications, digital media, interpretive materials, and collaborative storytelling initiatives. Whenever appropriate, interpretation will be developed in collaboration with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historians, cultural organizations, local communities, governmental agencies, and other partner organizations to ensure information is accurate, respectful, and representative of multiple perspectives.
- **Public Awareness and Outreach:** Increase statewide awareness of the Río Grande Trail through coordinated media relations, public presentations, community events, newsletters, publications, social media, and other outreach activities that communicate the recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, economic, and public health benefits of the trail. Outdoor efforts will encourage volunteer participation, stewardship, fundraising, and community engagement while strengthening long-term public support for the Association's Mission.

- **Stakeholder Communications:** Maintain regular communication with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, partner organizations, landowners, and community stakeholders throughout planning and implementation activities. Communications will emphasize transparency, collaboration, early coordination, and timely sharing of information that supports effective decision-making and long-term partnerships.
- **Organizational Transparency:** Provide regular updates regarding Strategic Plan implementation, Annual Work Plan accomplishments, financial stewardship, organizational performance, partnership initiatives, and Board actions through annual reports, newsletters, public meetings, digital communications, and other appropriate communication channels. The Association will communicate openly about organizational progress, opportunities, and challenges to strengthen public trust and accountability.

VII. Organizational Success Measures

The Board of Directors will monitor progress toward the Strategic Plan through a balanced set of organizational performance measures. Detailed annual performance indicators and targets will be established through the Annual Work Plan and reviewed by the Board each year.

The Board will monitor progress in the following areas:

1. **Trail Progress:** Progress toward planning, designation, stewardship, connectivity, and implementation of the Río Grande Trail.
2. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Strength and diversity of partnerships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, community organizations, and volunteers.
3. **Stewardship and Volunteer Engagement:** Growth of volunteer participation, stewardship activities, Adopt-a-Segment programs, youth engagement, and community involvement.
4. **Communications and Public Engagement:** Public awareness, stakeholder engagement, educational outreach, digital communications, website and social media engagement, media coverage, and public participation.
5. **Organizational Development and Governance:** Board development, committee effectiveness, policy implementation, organizational compliance, risk management, and governance effectiveness.
6. **Financial Sustainability:** Revenue growth, funding diversification, grants, memberships, donations, sponsorships, financial reserves, and organizational capacity.

7. Community and Economic Benefits: Progress in demonstrating and communicating the trail's economic, recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, and public health benefits to communities throughout New Mexico.

VIII. Supporting Documents

Implementation of this Strategic Plan is supported by governance documents, organizational resources, and implementation tools developed during formation of the Río Grande Trail Association. These supporting documents provide the framework for governance, partnership development, fundraising, performance evaluation, organizational administration, and implementation of the Strategic Plan. Supporting documents may be updated periodically without requiring amendment of this Strategic Plan.

Supporting documents include:

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Governance Report
- Public Engagement Report
- Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)
- Funding Prospect List
- Performance Measurement Framework
- Board recruitment, orientation, and governance materials
- Partner contact directory
- Volunteer and stakeholder database
- GIS resources, maps, and planning materials
- Organizational policies, administrative procedures, and financial management resources
- Other governance documents, organizational records, and implementation resources developed and assembled during formation of the Association

These documents collectively provide the inaugural Board of Directors with the information and tools needed to establish the Association, support effective governance, strengthen partnerships, pursue funding opportunities, monitor organizational performance, and implement the Strategic Plan.

IX. Appendix: Performance Measurement Framework

This appendix identifies illustrative performance indicators that may be used by the Board of Directors to monitor progress toward the Strategic Plan. Specific annual performance targets and reporting measures will be established through the Annual Work Plan and may be revised over time as the organization grows and organizational priorities evolve.

Trail Connectivity and Designation Progress

- **Miles Designated:** Number of trail miles formally approved and added to the statewide system each year.
- **Gap Reduction:** Percentage reduction in critical unmapped or inaccessible corridor bottlenecks.
- **Signage Installed:** Total number of continuous miles successfully brought up to unified wayfinding and safety standards.

Partnership Development

- **Relationship Development:** Number of collaborative partnerships, memoranda of understanding (where appropriate), invitations to participate, joint projects, educational initiatives, or other mutually supported activities developed with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, and other governmental and community partners.
- **Collaborative Agreements and Joint Initiatives:** Number of active collaborative agreements, memoranda of understanding, and joint initiatives supporting trail planning, stewardship, education, fundraising, and implementation.
- **Cross-Sector Coalitions:** Number of local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local governments actively participating in regional advisory panels.

Economic and Community Benefits

Measure and communicate, as information becomes available:

- Visitor spending associated with trail communities.
- Volunteer labor value.
- Local business participation.
- Tourism partnerships.

- Public and private investment leveraged.
- Community participation.
- Economic benefits to gateway communities.

Volunteer and Stewardship Participation

- **Stewardship Hours:** Total hours logged annually by volunteer trail crews and segment adopters.
- **Certified Leaders:** Number of community volunteers successfully completing the trail leader safety and maintenance certification.
- **Youth Engagement:** Number of local youth and conservation corps members employed in vocational trail maintenance projects.

Communications and Outreach Metrics

- **Public Awareness and Engagement:** Measure public awareness of the Río Grande Trail through stakeholder engagement, educational outreach, digital communications, website and social media engagement, media coverage, public meeting participation, and other opportunities for community involvement.
- **Communications Reach:** Measure the reach and effectiveness of digital communications, website usage, social media engagement, newsletters, media coverage, and other public information efforts.
- **Community Outreach and Feedback:** Track public meetings, presentations, stakeholder engagement activities, community inquiries, public comments, and other feedback received and addressed through the Association's outreach and engagement efforts.
- **Educational Resource Distribution:** Track the development and distribution of educational resources, including Good Neighbor Guides, interpretive materials, maps, visitor information, and other public education materials that promote responsible recreation and stewardship.

Organizational Growth and Governance Benchmarks

- **Regional Balance:** Achieve diverse geographic representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico across the Board of Directors, advisory groups, and regional committees.

- **Board Development:** Track Board member participation in orientation, governance training, continuing education, and annual Board self-assessments to strengthen leadership capacity and governance effectiveness.
- **Leadership Continuity:** Maintain succession plans for Board officers, committee leadership, and key organizational roles to support long-term organizational resilience.
- **Governance and Policy Development:** Develop, regularly review, and adopt governance, financial, risk management, records management, ethics, conflict of interest, volunteer management, temporary trail closure, and agricultural protection policies that support effective nonprofit operations.

Organizational Sustainability and Capacity Metrics

- **Annual Revenue Raised:** Total annual revenue generated through grants, donations, sponsorships, memberships, events, and other fundraising activities.
- **Active Membership Growth:** Number of active members participating in and supporting the organization each year.
- **Recurring Donor Retention:** Number and percentage of donors providing ongoing annual or recurring financial support.
- **Grant Development Activity:** Number of grant applications submitted annually and the percentage of applications successfully funded.
- **Funding Diversification:** Percentage of revenue derived from multiple funding categories, including grants, donations, sponsorships, memberships, events, and service-based revenue.
- **Financial Resilience:** Maintenance of operating reserves and unrestricted funds sufficient to support organizational stability and long-term sustainability.
- **Organizational Capacity:** Growth in organizational capacity through staff positions, contractor support, and specialized technical expertise as needed to implement strategic priorities.