

New Mexico Technical Assistance Gap Analysis Report

December 2025



New Mexico

**Department of Finance
and Administration**

**Infrastructure Planning
and Development Division**

Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	1
2	Introduction.....	4
	2.1 Summary of Recommendations	5
3	Approach	6
	3.1 Developing TA Inventory	7
	3.1.1 Defining the Inventory Scope.....	7
	3.2 Stakeholder Input.....	8
	3.2.1 Survey	8
	3.2.2 Listening Sessions.....	9
4	Findings	11
	4.1 Stakeholder Experience with Infrastructure Projects.....	11
	4.2 Barriers to Accessing TA	13
	4.2.1 Lack of Capacity and Funding	13
	4.2.2 Lack of Awareness	14
	4.2.3 Lack of Responsiveness	15
	4.2.4 Technology Challenges.....	16
	4.3 Availability of Existing TA.....	16
	4.4 Value of Existing TA	19
	4.4.1 Value of Existing Types of TA Resources	23
	4.5 Other Key Barriers to Implementing Infrastructure Projects.....	25
	4.5.1 Landscape and Prioritization of State and Federal Funding.....	25
	4.5.2 Funding Program Eligibility and Application Processes.....	26
	4.5.3 Funding Program Reporting Requirements	26
	4.6 TA Resources: Gaps and Needs by Topic	28
	4.7 Additional TA Topics	30
5	Considerations for Future Investments Recommendations.....	31
	5.1 Expanding Efforts	31
	5.1.1 Expand Capacity for Existing TA Providers	31

5.2 Building New Programs..... 32

5.2.1 Build Local Capacity through Regional TA Centers..... 32

5.2.2 Build a TA Network and Mentoring Program 32

5.2.3 Develop a Single Location for TA Resources 33

5.3 Other Considerations: Reducing and Streamlining Grant Requirements..... 33

References..... 34

New Mexico Technical Assistance Gap Analysis Executive Summary

1 Executive Summary

Purpose and Context

New Mexico’s ability to deliver infrastructure projects is increasingly constrained not just by a lack of funding, but by limited local capacity to plan, apply for, manage, and complete complex projects. While historic federal and state investments have expanded available funding, communities across the state, particularly small and rural communities, Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes, and special districts, continue to face significant barriers navigating technical assistance (TA) resources.

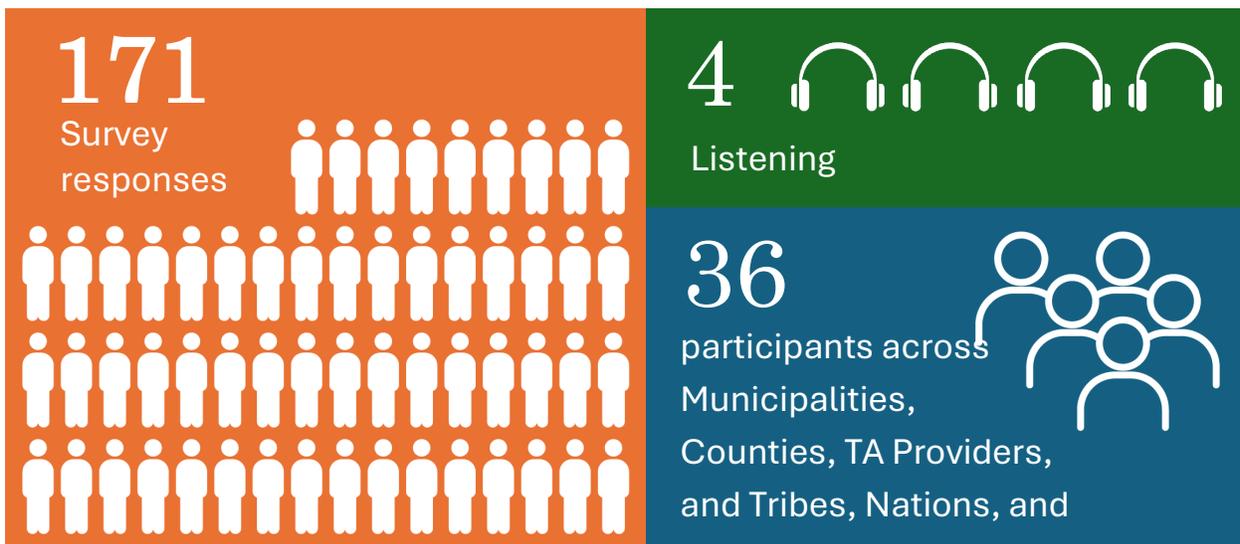
This TA Gap Analysis was conducted to understand where TA resources exist, where they fall short, and how the State can strengthen coordination, access, and effectiveness.

Methodology (condensed)

The analysis draws on a statewide survey (171 respondents), listening sessions with communities, TA providers, and state partners (36 participants), and the development of a statewide inventory of TA resources.



Statewide



Key Findings

Across sectors and entity types, the analysis identified consistent barriers:



Across sectors and entity types, the analysis identified consistent barriers. Together, these findings indicate that access to technical assistance (TA) is a primary constraint on project delivery. Survey respondents frequently highlighted limited capacity to identify and pursue funding and TA opportunities, often noting that communities must know where to look, persist in navigating fragmented resources, and understand what questions to ask. Stakeholders also pointed to challenges with funding eligibility, complex application processes, and significant reporting requirements that further strain limited administrative capacity.

Implication: Strengthening coordination, awareness, and delivery of technical assistance will be as critical as expanding funding in improving infrastructure project delivery statewide.

What Technical Assistance Can, and Cannot, Address

Technical assistance is well suited to support early-stage planning, project readiness, grant writing and management, navigation of available resources, and day-to-day compliance troubleshooting.

However, TA alone cannot resolve structural challenges such as fragmented or phased capital outlay funding, inconsistent grant rules and reporting systems, workforce

shortages (e.g., engineers, operators, CPAs), or long-term underfunding of operations and maintenance. Distinguishing between capacity gaps and systemic barriers is critical to setting realistic expectations.

Implications for State Policy and Investment

The findings suggest several implications for the State:



TA should be treated as a core delivery function, not an auxiliary service.



Strategic investment in TA capacity can help unlock existing capital funding.



Coordination and standardization may reduce long-term TA demand and administrative burden.



Improved visibility into TA requests and providers can support more data-informed decision-making.

Immediate Response and Next Steps



In response to stakeholder feedback highlighting challenges related to awareness, navigation, and coordination, the State has initiated near-term actions to improve access and visibility, including the development of a centralized technical assistance platform scheduled to launch in early 2026. Over the longer term, the findings support continued investment in TA capacity, coordination, and system-level reforms to strengthen infrastructure delivery statewide.

Note: Near-term implementation efforts referenced in this summary reflect actions underway following completion of this assessment, including the development of a centralized assistance platform intended to improve access and coordination.

2 Introduction

New Mexico is one of the largest states in the country, but also one of the least densely populated. Across the energy, water, broadband, and transportation sectors, infrastructure needs – and the challenges associated with meeting those needs in dispersed, rural communities and larger, urban areas – are significant and continually evolving.

Robust, well-maintained, and adequately funded public infrastructure is critical for the physical, environmental, economic, and social well-being of the people, communities, and businesses of New Mexico. Properly functioning infrastructure is also essential to achieving and maintaining a high quality of life and ensuring the long-term adaptability and resilience of communities in a changing climate. Like other states across the country, New Mexico is facing significant cross-sector infrastructure replacement and improvement needs due to lack of proactive planning, inconsistent investment, inadequate maintenance, and external factors.

To add context, a 2021 needs survey of rural communities indicated “the high-level estimate of costs to bridge the broadband gap in New Mexico is \$2 - \$5 billion, \$1.4 billion for water, and \$350 – 800 million for wastewater” (Pivotal, 2021). In addition to the significant financial cost of implementing infrastructure projects, several continuous issues that impede projects revolve around insufficient staffing and limited capacity to apply for and manage funding, onerous reporting requirements, and a diminishing workforce.

These challenges can be particularly acute in smaller, more remote communities with limited capacity to plan for, prioritize, and invest in large capital infrastructure projects. Capacity limitations are often compounded by vacancies or turnover in decision-making positions, lack of specialized expertise or training, and the complexity of the funding landscape, including program eligibility, match, reporting, and other grant requirements. For local and regional governmental entities, including municipalities, utilities, special districts, and Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos, technical assistance (TA) – or services, tools, and other resources that ultimately help these entities overcome barriers to understanding and accessing funding – can be a critical lifeline to evaluating, planning for, and addressing infrastructure needs.

In light of these needs, the State of New Mexico’s Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) Infrastructure Planning and Development Division (IPDD) contracted with Eastern Research Group, Inc. (ERG) to perform a project to enhance regional and local entities’ understanding of and access to TA resources throughout the state. The ultimate

output of the project will be a TA Navigator Tool that entities can utilize to connect them to available TA resources (e.g., products, providers, tools, and trainings). The TA Navigator Tool will be based on an inventory of available TA resources that ERG compiled during the Summer of 2025, and will be expanded based on the findings gathered from stakeholder outreach.

As part of the project, DFA and ERG conducted stakeholder outreach to assess TA barriers, needs, and gaps in New Mexico. This report is intended to inform the project by addressing the following questions:

- What TA resources are available and are underutilized?
 - What are the barriers that cause these resources to be underutilized?
- What gaps exist in current TA needs and resources?
 - What recommendations can be made to inform possible state funding and policy strategies to address the gaps?

This report includes a summary of findings from a survey and listening sessions on the current TA landscape in addition to TA barriers and gaps in New Mexico, through which DFA and ERG solicited input from stakeholders representing municipalities and counties; Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos; special districts, and TA providers. This report also includes general recommendations for consideration in expanding TA resources throughout the state and reducing complex grant requirements, based on feedback gathered from stakeholders.

2.1 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Expand Capacity for Existing TA Providers

Respondents and participants highlighted several TA providers – mainly Councils of Government (COGs), Rural Community Assistance Corp (RCAC), and other entities providing particularly valuable support for infrastructure projects. However, many of these entities were also identified as having limited capacity to provide the level of TA needed across the state. Participants recommended that New Mexico consider expanding financial support and capacity to existing TA providers, as they are trusted partners in many communities. Participants encouraged New Mexico to consider expanding existing (or establishing new) contracting mechanisms that provide communities with access to technically qualified consultants, particularly for communities with very limited resources.

Recommendation 2: Build Local Capacity through Regional TA Centers

Participants recommended New Mexico develop regional or local TA Centers, staffed with local community members to provide TA to nearby municipalities and special districts.

These TA Centers could assist with project management, workforce development, compliance reporting, and grant writing and management, among other topics. Respondents suggested that the state provide initial investments in TA Centers and allow the centers to expand and become more self-sufficient over time. New Mexico could also invest in workforce development programs to train and staff the TA Centers.

Recommendation 3: Build a TA Network and Mentoring Program

Participants identified the need for a coordinated network for TA support – including annual conferences, information sharing, and lessons learned. Listening session participants shared that they learned the most valuable lessons from their peers and could benefit from hearing from other small and rural communities about how they’ve overcome challenges related to project management, navigating bureaucratic processes, and addressing project delays. Participants suggested that New Mexico consider developing a mentoring program to support entities in need of TA, particularly in small and rural communities. Through this program, staff from small and rural communities and Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos could be paired with experienced staff from similar entities that could help them to navigate challenges.

Recommendation 4: Develop a Single Location for TA Resources

Survey respondents and listening session participants indicated the need for a single point-of-entry to access TA. Several respondents shared the challenge of not knowing where to go for TA and expressed the need for a single location or platform where all TA resources are available, including TA providers, resources, tools, examples, trainings, and the like. Participants encouraged New Mexico to consider developing a central, searchable, simple, and user-friendly database for TA resources throughout the state. The database could be expanded through a phased approach, beginning with existing TA resources, and later expanding to include specific information on available funding mechanisms, and additional topics for TA, as needed. Based on feedback gathered during the listening sessions and survey, the database should be simple, easy to use, and regularly updated to reflect available TA.

3 Approach

ERG applied a mixed methods approach to developing the TA inventory and collecting stakeholder input on experience accessing TA, gaps in available TA, and other TA-related needs throughout the state. The approach and methods are described further in this section, and include conducting research, developing and administering a survey, and gathering qualitative data through facilitating listening sessions.

3.1 Developing TA Inventory

3.1.1 Defining the Inventory Scope

ERG worked with DFA to define the scope of the TA resources in the inventory, understanding that the sectors covered in the inventory encompass many different types of physical infrastructure as well as infrastructure-related needs and goals (e.g., equity), and that TA takes many forms. As such, the TA inventory and TA Navigator Tool focus on the sectors, subsectors, and resource categories presented in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

Table 1. TA Inventory Sectors and Associated Subsectors/Technical Areas.

Sector	Subsector/Technical Area
Water	Drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, flood control, irrigation, and dams
Transportation	Public transit, rail, bridges, highways, roads, EV charging infrastructure, fleet electrification, walkability, and cyclability
Energy	Wind, solar, geothermal; decarbonization; electric grid and distribution, transmission, and storage; and energy efficiency
Broadband	Tribal connectivity; rural internet; digital subscriber line (DSL), cable, fiber, wireless, and satellite; and digital equity
General	Items that apply to multiple sectors: project planning; project management; permitting; monitoring; construction oversight and management; operation & maintenance (O&M); education; collaboration and communication; economic development; grant writing; grant matching; grant management; Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP); program development and implementation; mapping; budgeting; workforce development; human resources; and procurement

Table 2. TA Resource Categories and Descriptions.

Resource Category	Resource Type
Products and Tools	Templates, fact sheets, guidebooks, manuals, websites, tools
Training Materials	Webinars, presentations, videos, virtual or in-person trainings (e.g., instructor-led or self-paced)
TA Providers	Councils of Government, environmental finance centers, state agencies, circuit riders, sector-specific associations, non-profit organizations

3.1.1.1 Research Methods and Inventory Population

ERG began populating the inventory with information provided by DFA, including a list of state-specific TA resources available in New Mexico, and supplemented the initial list based on professional knowledge of state-specific and national TA resources. ERG then expanded the inventory by reviewing existing clearinghouses and databases containing TA resources and identifying additional relevant resources through research. Finally, ERG conducted sector, resource type, and audience-specific keyword searches to identify additional relevant entries. The inventory contains resources that are accessible to entities within New Mexico, with specific notes regarding geographic and eligibility constraints, and costs, as applicable.

3.2 Stakeholder Input

3.2.1 Survey

Following compilation of the initial inventory, ERG worked with DFA to develop a voluntary 18 question on-line survey that DFA disseminated on August 6, 2025, to entities that are receiving and providing TA throughout the state. DFA distributed the survey to counties; municipalities; special districts of government; Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos; state agencies; utilities; schools; Councils of Government (COGs); and others throughout the state. The objective of the survey was to gather information on the current landscape of TA in New Mexico, barriers to accessing TA, and specific needs for additional TA resources.

DFA disseminated the survey to 667 individuals and provided 30 days for survey response. DFA received 171 responses, most of whom represent a municipality (city, town, or village) or special district of government (Table 3). Additional information about the survey responses and listening sessions is available upon request by emailing TAG@DFA.NM.GOV.

Table 3. Organizations Represented by Survey Respondents.

Organization	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Municipality (city, town, or village)	32%	54
County	9%	16
Nation, Pueblo, or Tribe	14%	24
State agency	1%	2
Utility	8%	13
School	1%	2
Special District of Government	23%	40
Councils of Government	1%	2

Other ¹	11%	18
Total	--	171

Respondents were also asked to indicate which sector(s) they represent. Since respondents could select more than one sector, there were a total of 333 responses from 171 respondents. Results yielded 149 (45%) responses for “water”, 76 (23%) responses for “transportation”, 47 (14%) responses for “broadband”, 39 (12%) responses for “energy”, and 22 (7%) responses for “other”. Respondents listed various sectors for “other”, including green infrastructure; facility management; quality of life projects, government buildings, and historic preservation; community facilities project management, GIS mapping/asset management; solid waste; housing; senior centers within Tribal lands; a capital implementation program; and emergency services.

3.2.2 Listening Sessions

DFA and ERG held four 90-minute virtual listening sessions to gather feedback from entities regarding their experience with TA in New Mexico, including TA availability, helpfulness, gaps, and needs (Table 4). These sessions were intended to help DFA:

- Assess what TA resources stakeholders know are available or are making available, and the extent to which they are being used and why.
- Identify barriers to accessing and gaps in current TA resources.
- Learn about specific experiences with and needs for TA.

Table 4. Summary of Listening Session Attendance.

TA Group	Date of Listening Session (2025)	Number of Participants
Municipalities and Counties	August 20	13
Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos	August 21	5
Special Districts	August 22	6
TA Providers	August 26	12
Total	--	36

Those participating in the listening sessions represented various sectors and staff positions. Specifically, the participants from the municipalities and counties listening session included representatives from cross-cutting sectors, including finance, capital

¹ “Other” organizations included Acequias, Special Hospital Districts, Joint Powers Authorities, Land Grants, Post-secondary Institutions, Mutual Domestic Water Consumer Associations, Solid Waste Authority, and Non-profit entities.

planning, and grant administration in addition to representatives working on transportation grants. Participants from the Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos listening session included administrative managers and planners. Participants from the special districts listening session included local managers and commissioners for Acequias, and utilities across the water, sustainability, and financial planning sectors.

Lastly, participants from the TA providers listening session included non-profit entities, representatives from state agencies, the Grant Plant, Land Grant Council, COGs, and the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts. Most of the participants from the TA providers listening session represented the water sector. Four participants represented the “other” sector (finance, grants management, and soil and water conservation). Two participants represented the transportation and energy sectors, respectively, and 1 participant represented the broadband sector.

4 Findings

This section summarizes findings from the survey and listening sessions on TA availability, barriers, needs, and gaps. This section also includes additional information collected through the survey and listening sessions that does not specifically address infrastructure-related TA but pertains to barriers and challenges with grant funding that arise when navigating funding options for infrastructure projects.

Throughout the findings, as highlighted below, additional survey analysis focused on input from small communities (those identifying in the survey as representing counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos, or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities), as small, rural communities have the greatest need for TA throughout the state. Although not all counties, municipalities, and utilities are “small”, sorting answers by counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos, or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities provided a quick method to conduct additional analysis for potential trends across entities likely to represent “small communities.”

In the following sections respondents to surveys are referred to as “respondents” and those participating in listening sessions are referred to as “participants.”

4.1 Stakeholder Experience with Infrastructure Projects

Survey respondents reported a range of level of experience with infrastructure projects in New Mexico. The highest number of respondents (56) indicated they had been working on infrastructure projects for over 10 years, while the least number of respondents (22) indicated they had less than one year of experience working on infrastructure projects (Figure 1).

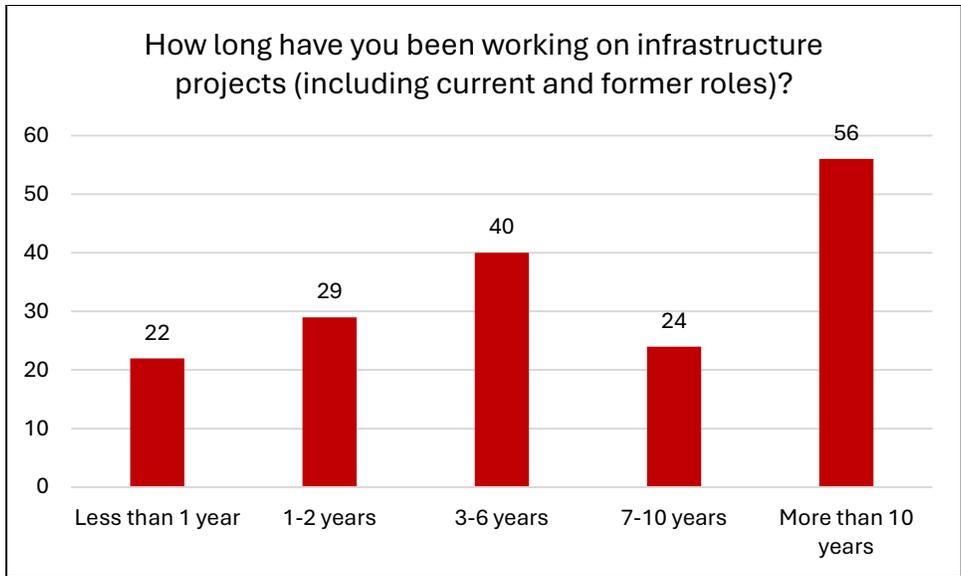


Figure 1. Summary of Infrastructure Project Experience identified by Survey Respondents.

Regarding familiarity with accessing TA in New Mexico, 44 (26%) of survey respondents indicated that they are moderately familiar with accessing TA and 41 (24%) indicated they have never tried to access TA. Twenty-two (13%) of respondents indicated they are very familiar with accessing TA (Figure 2).

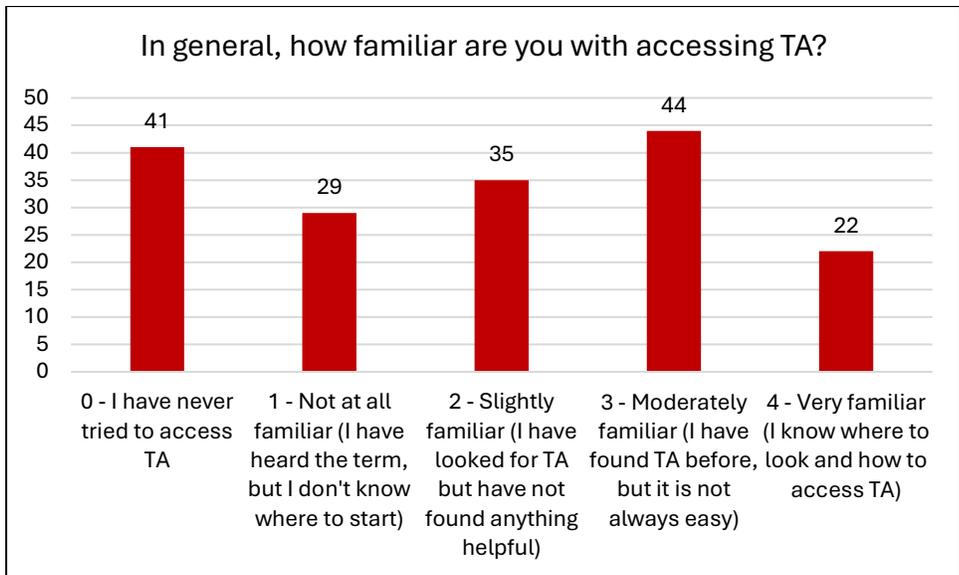


Figure 22. Summary of TA Familiarity by Survey Respondents.

Of the participants from the municipalities and counties listening session, 67% of participants had less than 2 years of experience and indicated they were not familiar with accessing TA in New Mexico. During the same listening session, 17% of participants had between 3 to 5 years of experience and 8% of participants had between 6 to 10 years of

experience. Lastly, 8% of participants had 10+ years of experience. For the same listening session, 25% of participants identified being somewhat familiar with TA in New Mexico, and 8% indicated being very familiar with TA.

Of the participants from the TA providers listening session, 50% of participants indicated that they had 10+ years of experience, 38% indicated they had between 6-10 years of experience, and 12% indicated they had between 3 and 5 years of experience. No participants indicated that they had less than 2 years of experience.

Since the Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos, and special districts listening sessions had less than six participants each, a formal survey was not administered to evaluate number of years of experience and familiarity with TA during the sessions. Rather, participants shared qualitative information on their level of experience. For example, participants of the Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos listening session shared familiarity with TA primarily provided by DFA and through the Department of Indian Affairs. Additionally, five participants from the special districts listening session had between 5 and 10+ years of experience and had accessed TA while one individual had approximately four years of experience with infrastructure projects and no experience accessing TA.

4.2 Barriers to Accessing TA

Based on the input gathered through the survey and listening sessions, respondents and participants identified key barriers to accessing existing TA resources. The primary barriers included lack of capacity and funding for entities to obtain TA; lack of awareness of available TA resources; and lack of responsiveness from TA providers, particularly those at the state level. Findings regarding challenges with accessing TA related to technology are also presented below, although this barrier was identified by a much smaller subset of respondents and participants. Key experiences, inputs, and details collected through stakeholder engagement are presented in the following subsections.

4.2.1 Lack of Capacity and Funding

Of 171 total survey responses, 70 (41%) respondents indicated that their organization has staff capacity to pursue TA, while 74 (43%) indicated their organization did not have available capacity to pursue TA. Of the respondents, 27 (16%) respondents indicated “I don’t know.” Similarly, of the 171 responses to the survey, 53 (31%) indicated that their organization has funding for TA, 80 (47%) indicated that their organization does not have funding for TA, and 38 (22%) indicated “I don’t know.”

Of 147 small communities (survey respondents identifying as representing counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos, or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities), 61 (41%) indicated that their organization has staff capacity to pursue TA, and 63 (43%)

indicated that their organization does not have staff capacity to pursue TA, while 23 (~16%) indicated “I don’t know.” Similarly, of the same subset of survey respondents, 46 (31%) indicated that their organization has funding for TA, 70 (48%) indicated that their organization does not have funding for TA, and 31 (21%) indicated “I don’t know.”

During the listening session with TA providers, 4 of 12 participants expressed that barriers to TA for many communities are related to lack of capacity and workforce. Specifically, TA providers highlighted water systems, stating that water system staff in small communities don’t have the capacity to search for, access, and apply for TA; in fact, these communities do not have enough certified operators for their water systems. Another listening session participant mentioned that communities, particularly volunteers on their board, do not have the capacity to find TA and there is a high rate of staff turnover, exacerbating the challenge of capacity building.

4.2.2 Lack of Awareness

Of the 171 responses to the survey, 76 respondents (45%) indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am aware of the TA resources that are available.” Of the same group of respondents, 69 respondents (40%) indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, indicating they are not aware of the TA resources available. Of the 171 respondents, 25 (15%) indicated “I don’t know.”

The survey respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “I know where to begin with accessing technical assistance.” Of 171 respondents, 70 (41%) agreed or strongly agreed that they know where to begin with accessing technical assistance and 73 (43%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 28 (16%) indicated “I don’t know.”

The survey respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the following statement, “I know who to contact to obtain technical assistance.” Of 171 respondents, 74 (43%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 68 (40%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 29 (17%) indicated, “I don’t know.”

Out of 147 small communities (survey respondents identifying as representing counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos, or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities), 64 (44%) indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am aware of the TA resources that are available.” Of the same group of respondents, 60 respondents (41%) indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 23 (15%) of respondents indicated “I don’t know.”

Approximately eight of the 36 (22%) listening session participants, specifically, those with less experience with infrastructure projects, reported facing challenges getting started

with TA, including not knowing where to begin, who to talk to, and what types of TA were currently available throughout the state. Others indicated that they were unaware of which entities provide TA and what their respective areas of TA include.

“I can’t answer these questions because I don’t even know what is available.”

“Sometimes I don’t know the questions to ask – I am that in the dark about the process and what is needed. I think more information about the basics would be helpful – funders, state agencies, even non-profit organizations.”

In open-ended responses to the survey question, “Do you have any suggestions for how to make TA resources more accessible?”, 32 responses were received. Six (19%) of respondents shared that they did not know where to look, who to reach out to, or had suggestions about making TA resources easy to find in a single location.

Of the 13 representatives from the municipalities and counties listening session, three participants identified challenges with not knowing where to go to find TA resources and the need for a single location where all TA information is available. Similarly, two of the five representatives from the Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos listening session asked if there was a site they could go to and learn about the types of TA available, including contacts, and the topics available for TA. Of the six representatives from the special districts listening session, one participant identified an access barrier of not knowing what TA is available throughout the state. Similarly, one TA provider shared that smaller water systems don’t know who to turn to or where to begin searching for TA.

4.2.3 Lack of Responsiveness

In an open-ended survey question, 18 respondents shared information about barriers, of which 7 respondents stated that they experienced difficulty with communication and delayed or lack of response from TA providers, particularly at the state level. One respondent experienced frustrations with high staff turnover at the state, in which the respondent had to continually restart conversations and re-ask questions, with little forward progress.

“Finding someone at the state to return phone calls or respond to an email to provide assistance is difficult.”

During the listening session with special districts, one participant indicated that they felt that special districts don't get enough attention. They reported that it is unhelpful when they reach out to state agencies for assistance and don't hear a response for weeks, as they need input from the agencies to move projects forward.

4.2.4 Technology Challenges

Of the 171 total responses, 148 (87%) indicated they have internet and other equipment needed to access technical assistance while 11 (6%) indicated they did not. Lastly, 12 (7%) respondents indicated "I don't know."

In open-ended responses to survey questions, two respondents indicated that they had challenges using a computer and navigating the internet to connect to TA resources. Other respondents indicated that some TA resources were not easily accessible online, or the respondent could not find what they were looking for.

"Make the website more user-friendly. When I try to look something up, it is often buried in multiple drop-down menus. Sometimes I give up because even typing in a keyword in search doesn't get me to where I need to go."

4.3 Availability of Existing TA

During stakeholder engagement, DFA and ERG asked a series of questions regarding the availability of existing TA. DFA and ERG wanted to gather input on challenges with TA availability and the need to expand existing resources and distinguish this need from complete gaps in TA. DFA and ERG also asked stakeholders about the availability of various types of TA resources to indicate the types of additional TA resources that may be needed.

In the survey, 86 (50%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "regarding infrastructure projects, I have the TA I need to complete my work" while 59 (35%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Lastly, 26 (15%) indicated "I don't know." Of 147 small communities (survey respondents identifying as representing counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos, or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities), 72 (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have the TA needed to complete their work, while 53 (36%) disagreed and 22 (15%) indicated "I don't know."

Similarly, respondents were asked to identify how available different TA products are, by sector. Across the sectors, many respondents indicated "I don't know" (Figure 3, Figure 4,

Figure 5, and Figure 6). In the survey, respondents were directed to select “I don’t know” if they were unfamiliar with a specific sector. Of note, the quantity of “I don’t know” responses were lower for the water sector in comparison to other sectors, which may be expected, as 149 or 171 (87%) of respondents indicated working within the water sector.

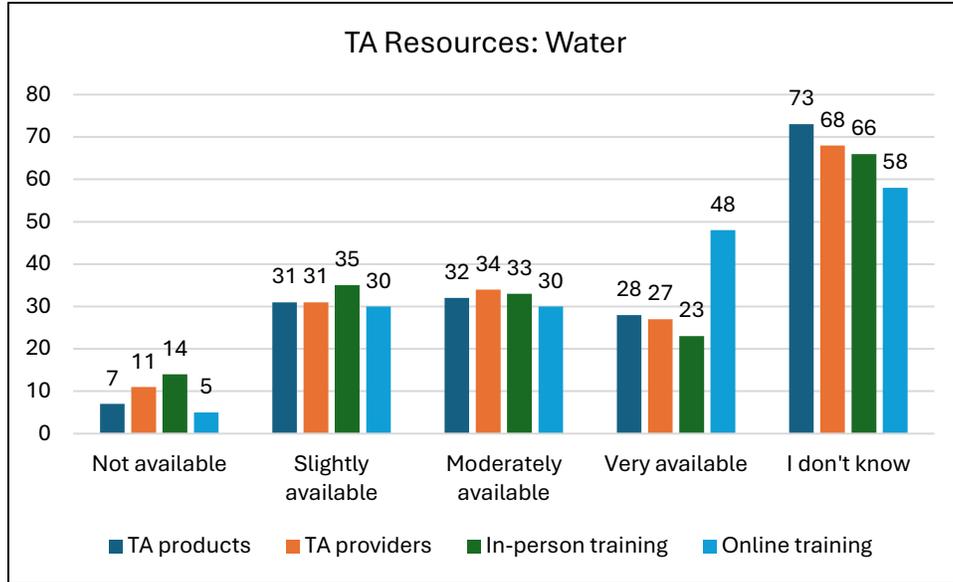


Figure 33. Perceptions of Available TA Resources: Water Sector.

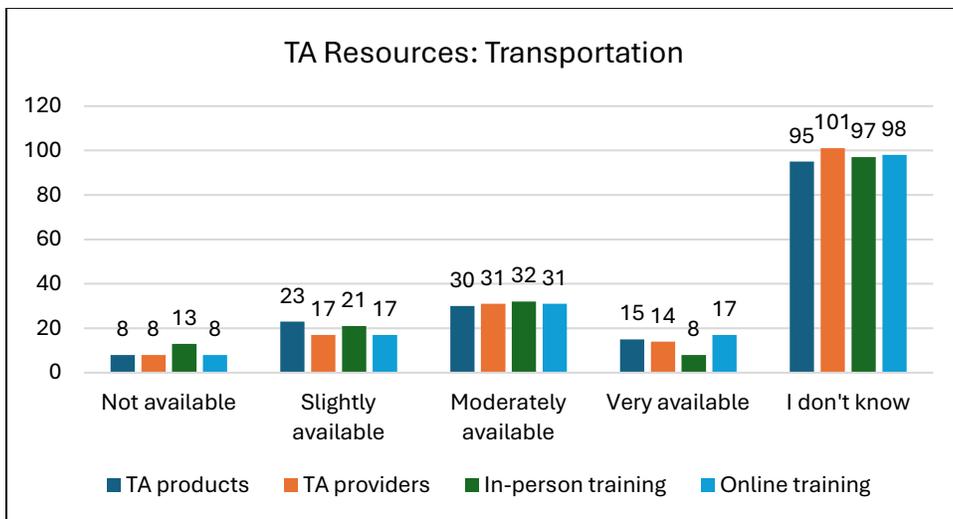


Figure 44. Perceptions of Available TA Resources: Transportation Sector.

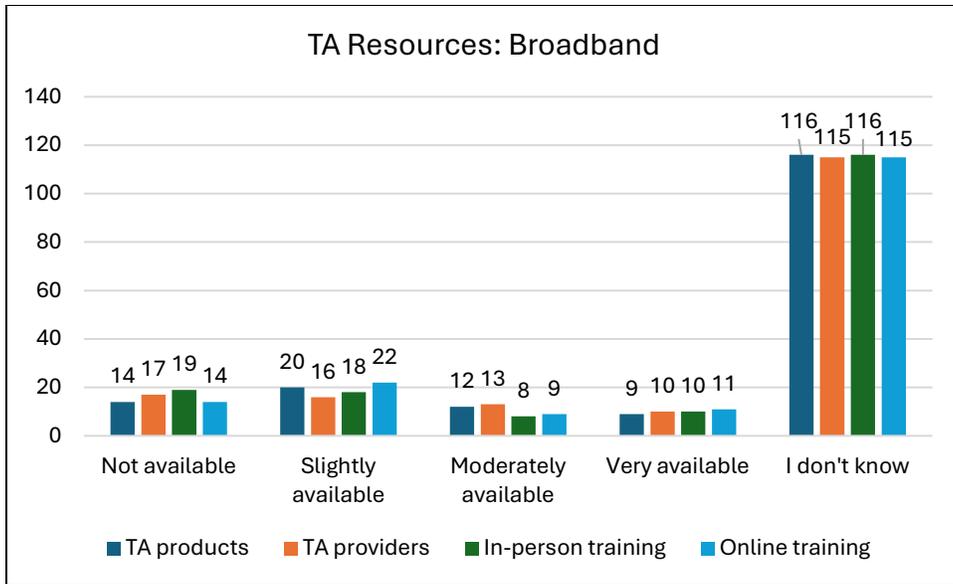


Figure 55. Perceptions of Available TA Resources: Broadband Sector.

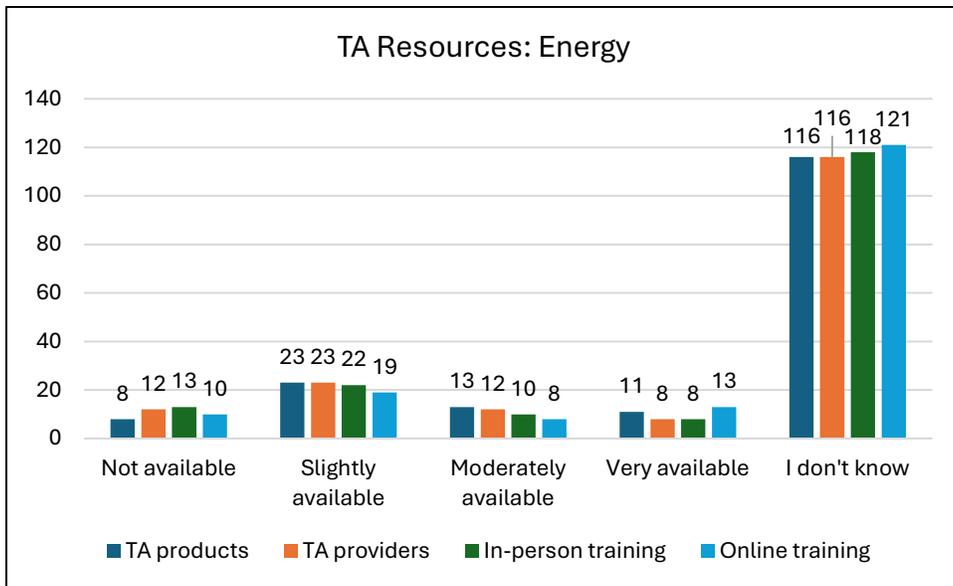


Figure 66. Perceptions of Available TA Resources: Energy Sector.

Related to the previous barrier of lack of capacity and funding, in response to open-ended survey questions regarding TA availability, 5 of 17 respondents indicated that TA is available but that respondents either cannot access the TA due to funding or capacity constraints within their organization or capacity constraints of the TA provider. In open-ended survey questions, 3 of 17 respondents shared that while they were aware of available TA, accessing it required persistence, and the results from TA support were commensurate to the amount of effort put into finding it.

“Overall, technical assistance availability in New Mexico has been helpful but somewhat limited. While there are valuable resources and workshops, they are not always offered consistently or at convenient times for smaller or rural organizations. Expanding on-demand resources, virtual trainings, and localized guidance would improve accessibility and ensure that all organizations can benefit from the support when they need it.”

Lastly, in response to open-ended questions regarding TA availability, two of 17 respondents shared that consultants are available to assist with TA, one of which stated, “Currently the TA available is if one’s organization hires consultants.” One participant from the municipalities and counties listening session highlighted multiple times that TA is available through on call professional services and that it’s important to encourage communities to utilize these professionals, particularly those without a technical background on infrastructure projects. These inputs indicate a lack of availability of TA outside of hired professionals. Although some communities may be able to access TA through paid experts, this is not always an option for resource-limited communities, particularly for small and rural entities; Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos; and special districts.

4.4 Value of Existing TA

Along a similar thread of existing TA, DFA and ERG asked a series of questions regarding the value or usefulness of existing TA. These questions and discussions were meant to identify which types of existing TA are most useful and why. Similarly, these questions were meant to gain feedback on potential barriers, gaps, and areas for improvement to make existing TA resources more useful to communities.

During the survey and throughout the listening sessions, respondents and participants were asked to share their perceptions of and experiences with TA in New Mexico, including which resources and format of resources are most helpful, and which are not. The survey asked the respondents to indicate the level to which they agree or disagree with five statements related to the usefulness of TA resources in New Mexico (Figure 7).

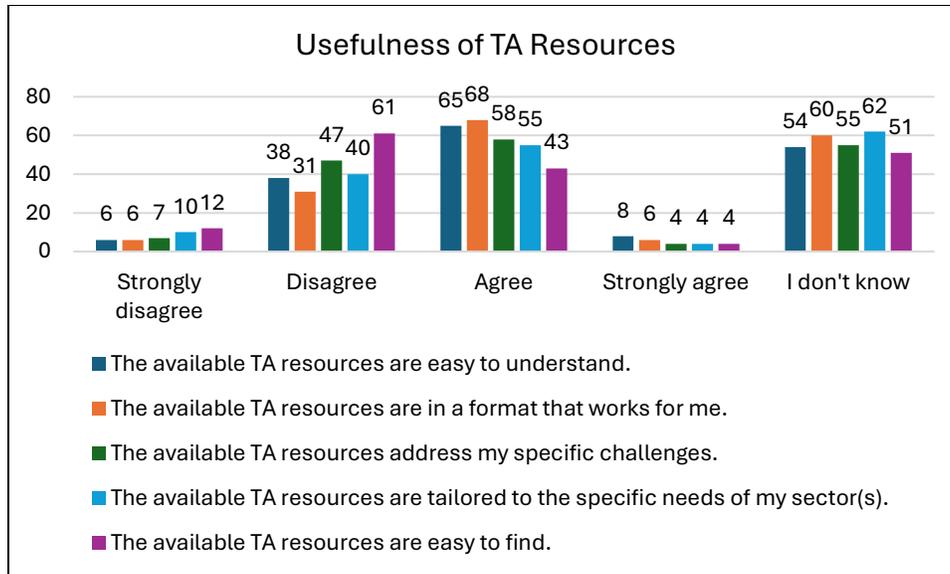


Figure 77. Summary of the Usefulness of TA Resources by Survey Respondents.

“I don’t know” responses for each statement ranged from 30% to 36% of respondents for each question. The “I don’t know” responses may indicate that respondents have not accessed TA resources in the past, and thus, cannot provide input regarding usefulness. None of the respondents indicating that they are “very familiar” with TA resources provided “I don’t know” answers to this series of questions. A summary of the responses includes:

- 73 (43%) agreed or strongly agreed that available TA resources are easy to understand, while 44 (26%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 54 (31%) responded “I don’t know.”
- 74 (43%) agreed or strongly agreed that available TA resources are in a format that works for the respondent, while 37 (22%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 60 (35%) responded “I don’t know.”
- 62 (36%) agreed or strongly agreed that the available TA resources address the respondent’s specific challenges, while 54 (32%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 55 (32%) responded “I don’t know.”
- 59 (35%) agreed or strongly agreed that the available TA resources are tailored to the specific needs of the respondents’ sector, while 50 (29%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 62 (36%) responded “I don’t know.”
- 47 (27%) agreed or strongly agreed that the available TA resources are easy to find, while 73 (43%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 51 (30%) responded “I don’t know.”

Additional data analysis of these responses was conducted across small communities (those identifying in the survey as representing counties; municipalities; Nations, Pueblos,

or Tribes; special districts of government; and utilities) in an effort to identify trends. No clear consistency to the profile of the respondents were identified with this type of response.

However, of note, 41 (24%) survey respondents indicated, “I have never tried to access technical assistance.” Approximately 13 of the respondents provided answers to this question that were not “I don’t know.” Thus, some responses may be erroneous based on the respondents’ indication of having no experience looking for or accessing TA.

In open-ended questions regarding experience interacting with TA providers in New Mexico, 4 of 24 responses indicated having a positive experience and 4 of 24 responses indicated there had been recent improvements with TA – particularly by DFA and New Mexico Capital Appropriations.

Also in open-ended questions, 3 of 24 respondents shared that the extent to which existing TA is helpful is dependent on the TA provider, as these respondents experienced positive interactions with some in-person TA and challenges with other types of TA resources.

As shown in Figure 8, TA providers, in-person training, and online training are the types of TA resources identified as being most needed throughout the state. Input gathered through listening sessions identified that New Mexico needs more one-on-one assistance, in-person and hands-on training, and on-site support. Survey respondents expressed the need for training for infrastructure projects on native lands and the need for additional TA to Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos. Similarly, respondents and participants identified that needs of small, rural communities and Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos are unique and TA needs to be tailored to those specific needs and communities.

“I’ve been in my current role for just over two years, and during that time, I haven’t received formal training for many of the responsibilities I’ve taken on. It’s been a continuous learning experience, relying heavily on self-guided efforts, collaboration with the Water Trust Board Administrator, the New Mexico Environment Department, and consistent communication with the engineers and project teams involved in our ongoing initiatives.”

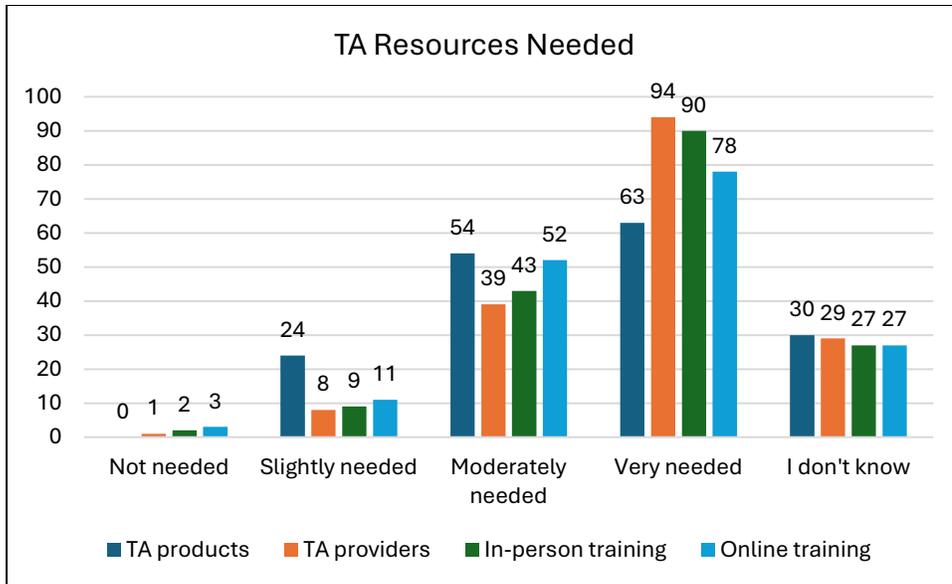


Figure 88. Summary of TA Resources Needed in NM by Survey Respondents.

“I have gotten a lot of help from NMED Drinking Water staff, RCAC advisors and trainings, and NMRWA circuit riders...help with financial reporting did not work for me at all, and therefore, we are very behind.”

Respondents specifically identified the following TA providers as being helpful and responsive:

- Rural Community Assistance Corp (RCAC)
- New Mexico Councils of Government (COGs)
- New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration (DFA)
- New Mexico Indian Affairs Department (IAD)
- New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)
- New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA)
- The Acequia Bureau (OSE/ISC)
- New Mexico Rural Water Association Circuit Riders
- New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (Office of the State Engineer)
- New Mexico Water Trust Board (New Mexico Finance Authority)
- New Mexico Office of the State Auditor
- New Mexico Land Grant Council
- USDA Rural Development

- Hired consultants

Survey respondents and listening session participants also provided the following feedback regarding TA providers at the state level:

- **NMDOT.** Two listening session participants shared having positive experiences with NMDOT. Others indicated needing more assistance and training in navigating NMDOT funding processes and complying with reporting requirements.
- **DFA.** The recent trainings DFA hosted have been helpful and communities would like DFA to offer more of these trainings.
- **NMED.** Some TA products and resources from NMED have been helpful. Participants would like to see more resources for smaller systems and operators.

4.4.1 Value of Existing Types of TA Resources

The survey asked the respondents, “In your experience in New Mexico, how helpful are the following technical resources in meeting your needs?” Respondents had the option to select multiple responses between the TA resources (products, providers, in-person training, and online training) as being not at all helpful, slightly helpful, moderately helpful, very helpful, or “I don’t know.”

For each type of TA resource, between 49 and 54 survey respondents (29 – 32%) indicated “I don’t know.” Based on data analysis, no clear consistency to the profile of the respondents was identified with the “I don’t know” response. A summary of the responses is presented in Figure 9. Additional highlights on the helpfulness of TA resources are presented below.

- The following resources were identified as “very helpful”:
 - Online training (40; 23%)
 - In-person training (37; 22%)
 - TA providers (36; 21%)
 - TA products (22; 13%)
- The following resources were identified as “moderately helpful”:
 - Online training (41; 24%)
 - TA providers (37; 22%)
 - In-person training (35; 20%)
 - TA products (33; 19%)
- The following resources were identified as “slightly helpful”:
 - TA products (53; 31%)
 - TA providers (37; 22%)

- In-person training (36; 21%)
- Online training (33; 19%)

Lastly, 5% of respondents indicated that each TA resource was “not at all helpful.”

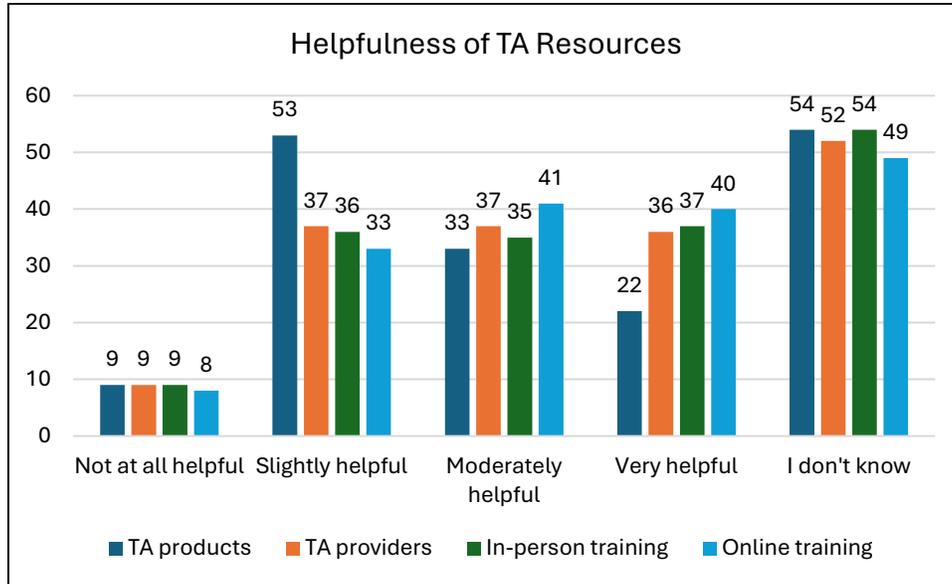


Figure 9. Summary of the Helpfulness of TA Resources by Survey Respondents.

Open-ended responses related to TA helpfulness from the survey include:

- Guidance documents are too conceptually broad and challenging to implement at the local scale.
- Information covered by TA products is not representative of the challenges faced by small utilities. For example, some resources assume that programs are well-funded, staffed, and have standard methods of operation, when in reality, many small utilities and communities struggle to find qualified staff and funding to support basic program implementation.
- General guidance documents do not reflect local/regional context in New Mexico and do not address state requirements or challenges with state-specific funding opportunities.
- Guidance documents, fact sheets, and webinar trainings erroneously assume that TA recipients have a baseline level of understanding of the topic.

4.5 Other Key Barriers to Implementing Infrastructure Projects

This section presents additional information gathered during the survey and listening sessions regarding barriers to funding and implementing infrastructure projects. While not directly related to availability, accessibility, and utility of existing TA resources, these barriers can help inform New Mexico’s future decisions on development of and investment in additional TA services related to infrastructure projects.

4.5.1 Landscape and Prioritization of State and Federal Funding

Participants indicated that no single funding source provides complete project funding for infrastructure projects. Aligning multiple funding sources is onerous and complicated, and often leads to projects being incomplete or exceeding their original schedule.

“The LFC, Office of the Gov, Legislature needs to stop 100% funding piecemeal projects unless its fully funded. Invest in fully funded projects. It’s the same method year after year and it’s not working.”

“Projects throughout the state have, and continue to be partially funded and very rare are they fully funded. Projects should only be ‘fully funded’ going forward. The state often asks for communities to get plan(s) and design(s) and be shovel ready and then the project(s) gets ‘half-funded’ or partially funded and leads to other issues such as rising costs, leaving projects unfinished, upset constituents, shelved plans, etc.”

During the listening session with municipalities and counties, participants noted that elected officials at the county level have different priorities than other departments at the municipal level and lack an understanding of what is needed to support robust infrastructure projects, making it difficult to comprehensively prioritize, advance, and complete large capital infrastructure projects. Participants reported that this challenge results in small amounts of money allocated across multiple projects instead of prioritizing and more fully funding infrastructure projects.

“It takes a tremendous amount of resources to successfully navigate a project development and implementation process.”

4.5.2 Funding Program Eligibility and Application Processes

Listening session participants from the counties and municipalities; Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos; and special districts cited onerous grant applications, reporting, and other associated requirements as impediments to obtaining funding for infrastructure projects. Specifically, entities noted difficulties navigating funding programs, short application windows, extensive reporting requirements, and lack of help from the agencies responsible for administering grants as key barriers.

“One of the issues of grant writing is the amount of work it takes to put together an application and the amount of red tape so communities get frustrated and often just ignore the grant opportunities or lack subject matter expertise/experienced persons. Grants need to be simplified.”

“The bureaucratic process is very unfriendly and unhelpful to grant recipients.”

Participants in listening sessions also identified the need for improved communication between state agencies. One participant reported instances where different state agencies had provided conflicting guidance, and the grant recipient had to coordinate communication between the agencies to resolve the confusion regarding reporting requirements. At least three survey respondents indicated that state employees could benefit from additional training to better answer questions about their agency’s grant programs.

Respondents and participants reported pre-qualifying eligibility requirements as a barrier to accessing funding, particularly from sources that required applicants to have a completed asset management plan, preliminary engineering plans, or shovel-ready projects. Many entities (particularly small and rural communities) do not have the initial funding to meet these prerequisites and are therefore ineligible to receive funding from certain sources. Some respondents also noted that if there were funding sources available to support preliminary activities, they were not aware of them.

4.5.3 Funding Program Reporting Requirements

Participants indicated that there are numerous platforms for grant reporting and that reporting requirements and forms differ between state agencies and programs and change regularly. Specifically, survey respondents cited different financial reporting requirements between DFA and NMDOT, among other state agencies. Many respondents indicated the

need for streamlined and consistent reporting requirements and standardization across state agencies and noted that it is particularly helpful when agencies do not require resolutions on grant agreements.

“Capital outlay and ICIP access change yearly and are a learning curve that is sometimes cumbersome when prompted to assist organizations.”

Participants described difficulties learning new reporting requirements and adapting to changing requirements and stated that systems, including the Capital Projects Monitoring System, are not user-friendly. Participants also expressed frustration that there is little to no notification of when grant and financial reporting requirements change and noted the need for training on reporting requirements, particularly when new systems and new forms are implemented. Similarly, TA providers noted difficulties in helping communities with completing forms and reporting requirements that continuously change.

3.5.4 Limited Capacity

Similar to the limitations that lack of capacity creates for pursuing TA, respondents also noted that capacity limitations impede their ability to build a project pipeline, identify and obtain funding for project implementation, and comply with grant management and reporting requirements (particularly when coupling multiple funding sources with different requirements).

During the listening sessions with Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos, one of five participants mentioned needing additional staff capacity to manage grants, including meeting reporting requirements. Some entities, such as Acequias and special districts rely on volunteer leadership, which lack both the consistent capacity and technical expertise for effective project planning and management. Similarly, volunteer organizations don't have the technical expertise for executing large infrastructure projects. One survey respondent explained that at their organization, there were two staff administering thirty projects and it was difficult to balance competing priorities.

“The issue is not applying for grants at the federal level: the issue is post-award management and reporting requirements that make staff not want to pursue.”

Respondents also noted compounding challenges of workforce constraints and increasing responsibilities and obligations on existing staff and organizations (including responding to natural disasters and other emergencies) without additional funding, increasing the challenges for project development and implementation.

“The past two years we have dealt with two large fires. It has been time consuming as a volunteer board...our obligations are expanding, our capacity is limited by our guaranteed revenue stream. TA is much needed to support our organization.”

4.6 TA Resources: Gaps and Needs by Topic

DFA and ERG presented questions in the survey to ask respondents about specific gaps in current TA resources in New Mexico. Figure 10 identifies key topics for TA identified by survey respondents. In summary, project planning and management; financial audits; navigating funding options; grant writing; and grant management and reporting were identified as some of the key topics in which TA is needed throughout the state.

Stakeholders identified the need for additional TA, support, and funding with infrastructure project planning. Specifically, respondents and participants identified the need for up-front and initial planning support and funding. Respondents also indicated the need for one-on-one TA to help develop and manage projects and apply for project funding.

“There is a strong need for TA programs tailored for administrative staff who support infrastructure projects. Expand onboarding and training resources through the New Mexico Infrastructure Finance Conference or offer webinars and toolkits through the Water Trust Board – covering PM, application processes, and regulatory compliance.”

Various participants indicated the need for more support with cost estimates – particularly those that accurately reflect inflation rates, current building material costs, and project timelines. Participants also identified the need for engineering TA support for developing accurate construction cost estimates.

1. Please rank the following technical assistance topics in the order of those that are most needed in the state (with 1 being the highest). *

171 Responses

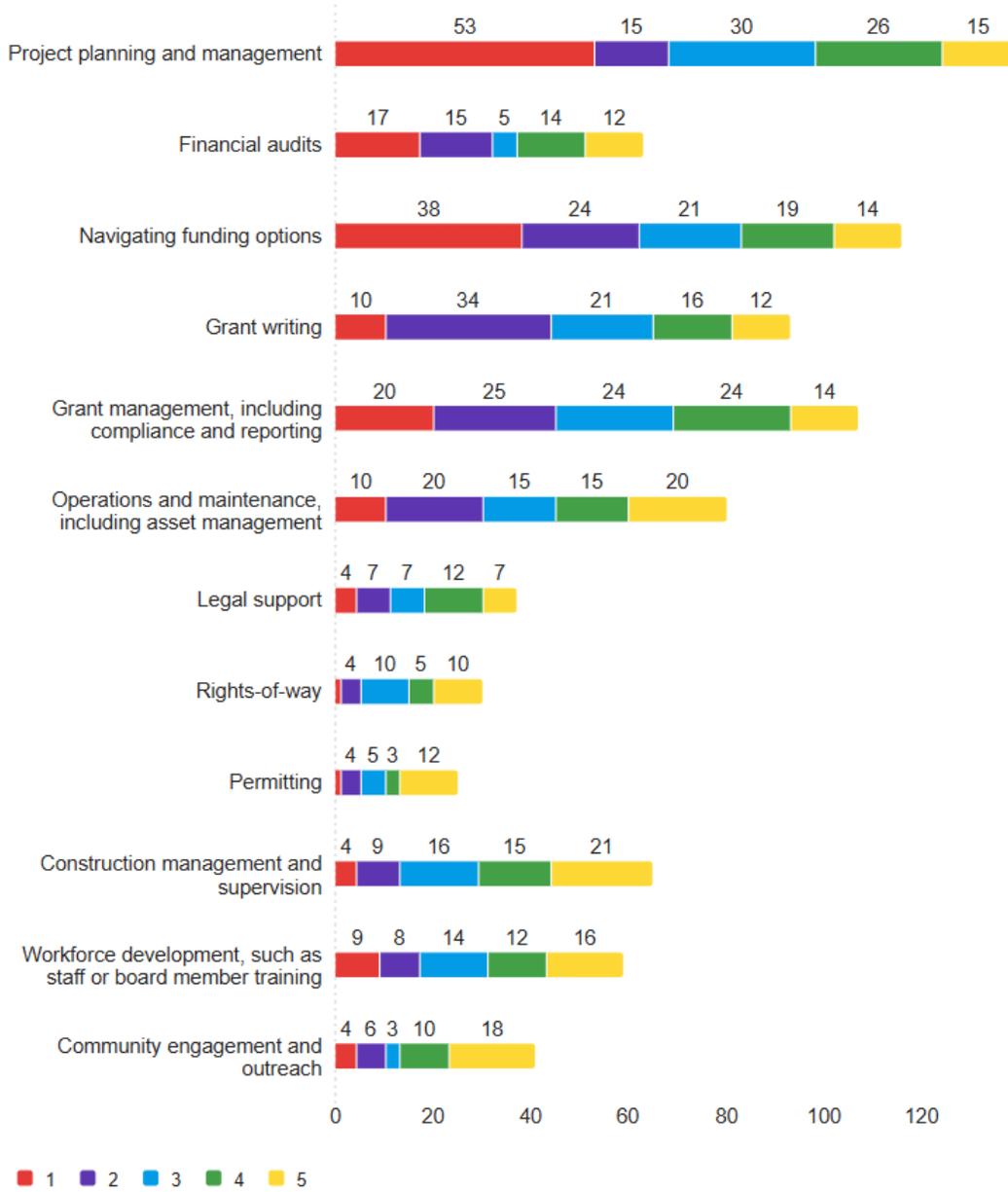


Figure 1010. Summary of TA Topics Most Needed by Survey Respondents.

4.7 Additional TA Topics

Table 5 presents recommendations for additional training topics, as reported by survey respondents and listening session participants, organized generally by theme.

Although some topics are included in the current TA Inventory, the resource may not fit the needs of TA recipients due to lack of awareness of the resource, resource format, or specific subject matter. For example, in open-ended survey responses, 7 of 66 (11%) responses identified the need for additional TA for grant writing. The TA Inventory includes several resources for grant funding. However, participants may either not be aware of these existing resources or participants may prefer to receive grant writing assistance as in-person support instead of through a guidebook.

Table 5. Summary of Topics for Additional TA.

General Topic	Detailed Requests
Administration/Work Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resources • Project procurement • Education and apprenticeship programs
Financial/Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant writing • Cost-benefit analysis • Sources of available grant funding; creative financing; aligning multiple financing sources • Local Government Budget Management System • Accurate cost estimates for projects • Accounting reporting, auditors, accountants • Grant reimbursement process • State purchasing process • Sunshine Portal; SAM.gov • ICIP process (from “wish list” to funding) – including FAQs • Government procurement • Intergovernmental agreements (between states and Tribes)
Engineering, management, construction, and operations/maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding project cycle and funding at each step (planning, project development, design, construction, and close-out) • Construction management (and funding to support construction management) • Construction oversight and quality reviews • Day-to-day challenges of operating a small utility • O&M of systems; life spans of materials/systems • Regulatory compliance

Legal Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permitting (USACE, archaeological studies, etc.) • Easements • Rights of way • Contractual
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cybersecurity

Several participants also indicated the need for additional training topics that apply to multiple sectors and were not specifically covered in the initial TA inventory, including affordable housing, building resilient economies, behavioral health, public safety infrastructure, supporting senior centers, municipal solid waste, and green infrastructure.

5 Considerations for Future Investments Recommendations

Survey respondents were asked to share suggestions for where they would like to see additional investments in infrastructure-related TA. Several key themes arose in the responses, including suggested investment in capacity building at the local level, TA centers, and workforce development.

The following subsections present overall recommendations for New Mexico’s consideration, based on recommendations and suggestions identified through the survey and listening sessions. The following recommendations are organized based on expanding existing programs and efforts, the need for building new programs, and other related considerations.

5.1 Expanding Efforts

5.1.1 Expand Capacity for Existing TA Providers

Respondents and participants highlighted several TA providers – mainly COGs, RCAC, and other entities providing particularly valuable support for infrastructure projects. However, many of these entities were also identified as having limited capacity to provide the level of TA needed across the state. Participants recommended that New Mexico consider expanding financial support and capacity to existing TA providers – as they are trusted partners in many communities. Similarly, participants recommended that the state consider providing other methods for incentivization, including building workforce programs and apprenticeships to build capacity for TA providers. Lastly, participants encouraged the state to consider expanding existing (or establishing new) contracting mechanisms that provide communities with access to technically qualified consultants—particularly for communities with very limited resources.

5.2 Building New Programs

5.2.1 Build Local Capacity through Regional TA Centers

Participants recommended New Mexico develop regional or local TA Centers. These TA Centers could be staffed with local community members who provide TA to smaller municipalities and special districts. The TA Centers could assist with project management, workforce development, compliance reporting, and grant writing and management, among other topics. Respondents suggested that the state provide initial investments in TA Centers and allow the centers to expand and become more self-sufficient over time. These TA Centers could also be located regionally to help serve multiple local entities. Examples of successful TA centers reported by respondents include Lower Rio Grande Public Water Works Authority, the El Valle Water Alliance, and the Mora County Water Alliance.

Additionally, New Mexico could invest in workforce development programs, starting with education and apprenticeship programs. Individuals graduating from the training programs could then work for the TA Centers. This approach would also help to continue building and sustaining local capacity.

Respondents also suggested allocating funding for TA providers for capacity building support instead of for transactional tasks. The TA providers could convene communities within specific regions and provide TA to multiple entities instead of approaching communities one-by-one. Respondents provided an example, stating that RCAC and NMED are currently working to support local capacity building through their Water Leadership Institute Convenings.

5.2.2 Build a TA Network and Mentoring Program

Participants identified the need for a coordinated network for TA support – including annual conferences, information sharing, and lessons learned. Those participating in listening sessions specifically indicated that they learned the most from their peers, including others that were present in the listening sessions. Several participants identified that they would like to hear from other small and rural communities about their challenges and how they've overcome them, particularly regarding project management, navigating bureaucratic processes, and addressing project delays. Participants identified they felt they could learn from other communities and share information with one another to increase standardization and reduce duplicative efforts.

Participants suggested that New Mexico consider developing a mentoring program to support entities in need of TA, particularly in small and rural communities. Through this program, staff from small and rural communities and Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos could

be paired with experienced staff from similar entities that could help them to navigate challenges.

5.2.3 Develop a Single Location for TA Resources

Survey respondents and listening session participants indicated the need for a single point-of-entry to access TA. Other respondents indicated that it would be helpful to have a matrix (or similar resource) to know which entities provide TA and their respective areas of expertise.

Regarding TA access and helpfulness, participants indicated that they were unsure where to find resources and that it would be helpful to have a single location or platform where all TA resources are available in one location, including TA providers, resources, tools, examples, trainings, and the like. Similarly, participants indicated that there is not currently a single location to access to learn about available TA. Participants encouraged New Mexico to consider developing a central, searchable, simple, and user-friendly database for TA resources throughout the state. The database could be expanded through a phased approach, beginning with existing TA resources, and later expanding to include specific information on available funding mechanisms, and additional topics for TA, as needed. Based on feedback gathered during the listening sessions and survey, the database should be simple, easy to use, and regularly updated to reflect available TA.

5.3 Other Considerations: Reducing and Streamlining Grant Requirements

Based on feedback gathered from participants, simplifying the grant application, management, and reporting processes, in addition to standardizing reporting requirements across state agencies, may reduce the barrier to funding and implementing infrastructure projects for communities. Ideally, reducing the level of effort associated with accessing, obtaining, and applying for grant funds may reduce the overall TA communities need to utilize grant funding. Additionally, reducing the need to couple different funding sources may reduce overall project delays and barriers. Lastly, reducing onerous requirements may help to alleviate several capacity restraints on communities – particularly small and rural entities.

References

Pivotal, 2021. *Rural Infrastructure Needs Study 2021: New Mexico*. Prepared for the New Mexico Legislative Council Services.

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/InterimCommittees/REOTF/2021/Rural%20Infrastructure%20Needs%20Study%202021.pdf>

