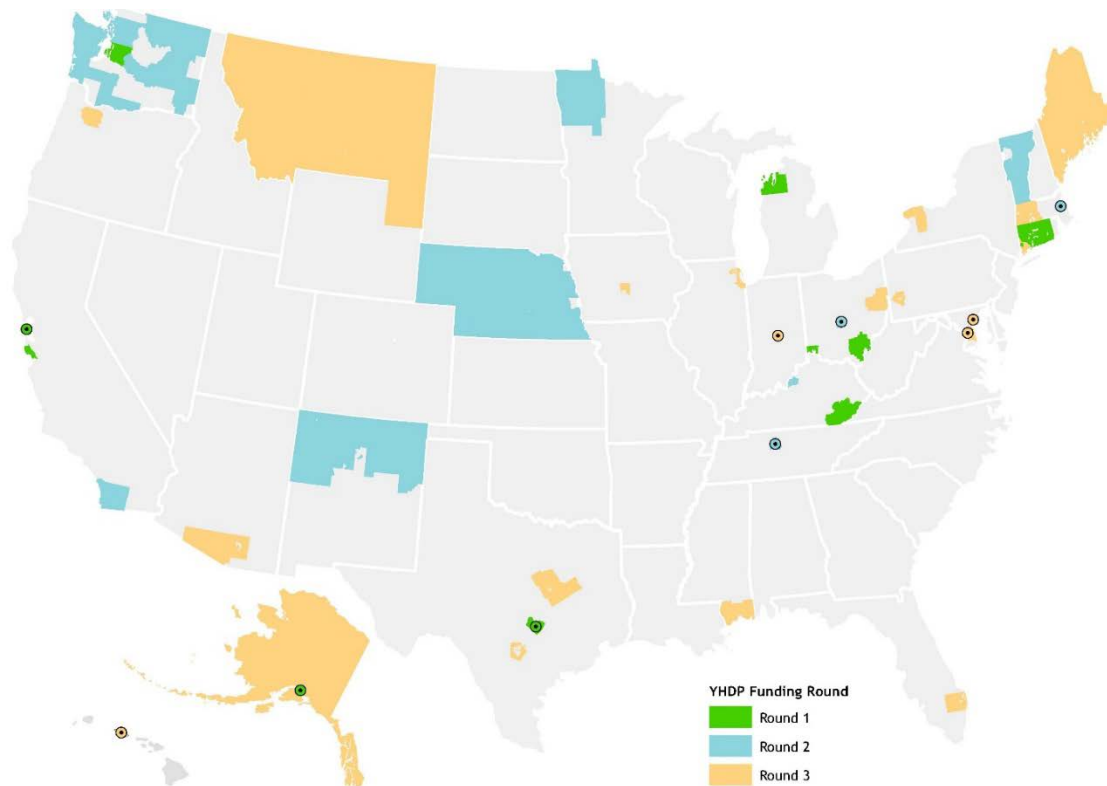


# Spotlight Series: Rural YHDP Application - Lessons Learned from New Mexico

Launched in 2016, [HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program \(YHDP\)](#) has competitively awarded three rounds of funding to 43 communities who are working to create a systemic response to prevent and end youth homelessness. In 2020, HUD will release a new Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for up to 50 communities, including at least 8 rural sites, under YHDP.

SNAPS recognizes that preparing to apply for the YHDP NOFA requires dedicated leadership, youth with lived experience support, and local capacity to effectively plan and submit a competitive application. SNAPS is excited that for many communities—including those not awarded—that the process of planning is beneficial to accelerating, or in some communities kick-starting, local efforts to prevent and end homelessness for youth. Our partners in Northern New Mexico, a YHDP Round II rural site, recently shared their experience on the benefits of the application planning process and lessons learned along the way.



## What inspired Northern New Mexico communities to apply for YHDP?

New Mexico has the fifth largest land area within the United States with diverse geography and many cultures. For YHDP, the New Mexico Balance of State CoC Collaborative Applicant YHDP Lead Agency brought together local stakeholders across the fourteen northern counties—including two Native American reservations and sixteen unique Tribal Pueblos—to create a rural community strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Community representatives from each of the fourteen northern counties saw YHDP as an opportunity to mobilize youth and service providers across an expansive rural geography and to work towards a common vision of preventing and ending youth homelessness. After reading a [blog](#) that encouraged communities to apply for the YHDP grant, Shelly Felt, Executive Director for [Youth Shelters and Family Services](#) in Santa Fe, NM was inspired and she engaged local leadership to begin the process of preparing the application.

The core application team was comprised of representatives from the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness, Youth Shelters and Family Services, Dream Tree (local Runaway Homeless Youth providers), and the newly formed Youth Action Board. This group led the application process and collaborated with different community service partners to form the Northern New Mexico YHDP leadership team and begin drafting the application, leveraging different strengths of the partners.

The regional approach to applying for funding was successful and resulted in a grant award of \$3.37M as part of the FY17 YHDP NOFA.

*“We hold a belief that youth and young adults possess the strength, knowledge and wisdom to direct their own lives, and we are committed to listening and partnering with them to identify solutions.” – Shelly Felt, Youth Shelters and Family Services, YHDP Lead Agency for N. New Mexico*

*“I got to see the direct impact of my input and input of other youth involved in the process. Here in Santa Fe, a lot of the things that we said in the YAB matters so much and has helped other youth that homelessness. There are already other youth being housed through the rapid rehousing projects we helped create and are receiving better services because of our work.” -Saira, Youth Action Board*

## Unanticipated Opportunities: New Collaboration, Partnerships & Investment in Solutions for Youth Homelessness

The application process generated new opportunities for authentic youth collaboration (see the [Youth Collaboration Webinar](#) for more information). The Northern New Mexico YHDP formed the Northern New Mexico Youth Action Board (YAB) comprised of young people with lived expertise who live throughout the region. Increased focus on youth collaboration created new opportunities to practice more equitable and inclusive system planning strategies. YAB

members were instrumental throughout the YHDP planning process as well as implementation of YHDP projects, as members helped to identify barriers young people face in the region and developed creative solutions to address those barriers. Through direct input and leadership of the Youth Action Board created through YHDP, the community was able to significantly increase state level investment in efforts to address youth homelessness. During the 2020 legislative session, lawmakers in New Mexico appropriated \$413,000 from the state general fund to match federal funds awarded for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP).

The YHDP application planning process also created new opportunities for **meaningful collaboration with tribal nations** who historically have not been engaged with the local homeless response system. This new coordination increased access to resources for native youth experiencing homelessness.

YHDP required more meaningful collaboration across the region and sparked new engagement from system partners like the New Mexico Child, Youth and Family Department and New Mexico McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons. (See the [Ending Youth Homelessness Guidebook Series: Mainstream System Collaboration](#) for more information.) While these partners had existing working relationships with the CoC, the YHDP application process leveraged a deeper level of cross-system collaboration that has since created new resources for youth. While it took significant investment, the YHDP grant application process created a strong foundation of collaboration and cooperation across stakeholders and young people that continues to build momentum.

## What your community can do to prepare for the next round of YHDP funding

As communities prepare to apply—often not for the first time—for the next round of YHDP funding, communities should consider the following opportunities for strengthening their current system response:

- If your community does not already have one, begin forming a Youth Action Board (YAB) to guide the development of your YHDP application and planning. If your community already has a YAB, look at how it can be strengthened and more integrated into the CoC. Some resources your community may want to consider for this work is HUD's [Youth Collaboration webinar](#) and True Colors United [Youth Collaboration Toolkit](#).
- Review existing data on youth homelessness to better understand how youth experiencing homelessness are currently being served – or not - through the local homeless services system. Data sources that your community should include Runaway and Homeless Youth providers, National Center for Homeless Education, and Job Corps, among others.

- Share results of your review with all stakeholders and use the findings to inform system-wide planning as well as targeted planning to address disparities that may exist.
- Promote diversity and equity within the CoC's Board and other decision- or policy-making bodies.
- Implement steps to elevate a focus on efforts to end youth homelessness through representation on the CoC board and other CoC decision-making bodies.
- Identify concrete steps the community can undertake to elevate efforts to end youth homelessness

We offer our gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of each community working toward preventing and ending youth homelessness.

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