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NM EPSCoR/NM SMART Grid Center Externship at the New Mexico Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department.

Reflection

This summer, I drafted a report on energy efficiency initiatives for low-to-moderate income (LMI) New Mexicans. This report was drafted for the Energy and Conservation Management Division (ECMD) within the Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department. ECMD has a broad mission to enhance energy efficiency in New Mexico—to develop and implement effective clean energy programs, promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and alternative fuels. ECMD has sought to continue to improve New Mexico's ranking by the American Council for and Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE). One area which could significantly improve this ranking is by enhancing energy efficiency policies for LMI energy consumers and ratepayers. This is an area of particularly high need in New Mexico   and a direct way to address poverty and improve quality of life for low-income New Mexicans. The goal of my report was to identify how other states have approached LMI energy efficiency policies, and how policies could be implemented here.

The bulk of the report assignment required me to research which policies, programs and initiatives exist at the statewide level, nationally. Over the 10-week course of my research, I developed a 50-plus page work product which provides a state-by-state, region-by-region look at ways states have provided these LMI initiatives. Logistically, the project (and the sections of my report) can be broken into a few phases. The first phase was to orient myself to the scope of the issues. This included overviews and Zoom meetings with ECMD staff, who explained the current landscape of LMI policies. The second phase was researching and drafting state-by-state policies and grabbing comparative data about those states. Next, I drafted a section about LMI in New Mexico, currently. Finally, I compared the other state policies with ours, and made recommendations. Over the course of the work, I submitted weekly drafts and did check-ins with ECMD staff. The staff helped guide the scope and direction of my research and drafting. While Covid-19 certainly limited my ability to collaborate with the team in person, we utilized Zoom and other distance communications tools to make edits, learn new concepts and check in.

I certainly feel that working on this project has enhanced my skill set. This was a very multi-disciplinary effort, and integrated economics, legal, communications and public policy skills. My research process for the report required me to home in my legal and policy analysis skills to forecast challenges to implementation of those programs for low to moderate income consumers and ratepayers here in New Mexico. In the course of my research, I learned a lot about the energy efficiency policy framework that exists between federal, state, local and utility actors. I also learned that approaches vary heavily between rural and urban states, and that differences in programming are correlated to state revenue. Because of this correlation, some of my research and analysis factored in the timely challenges to state revenue presented by the impacts of Covid-19. Because of the project's requirement to integrate current events, drafting this report certainly helped enhance my skillset to develop policy solutions in a dynamic world. My favorite thing about working on this project was learning about the diverse needs of states across the country. I sincerely hope that my work inspired a path forward for ECMD and will help New Mexico continue to advance in its ranking with the ACEEE.