

**Diversity & the Citizens' Advisory Board: Aligning Disparate Views for Better Results -
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ABSTRACT

The Northern New Mexico Citizens' Advisory Board (NNMCAB) is a group of "citizen experts," i.e., experts on being citizens who take the time and focus their attention to grow more informed about nuclear science, nuclear waste remediation, and environmental monitoring issues. The Board digests complex information associated with these topics in light of the Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) and Department of Energy's (DOE) activities in Northern New Mexico and discusses and conveys this information clearly to a diverse regional stakeholder population that includes a 400+ year old Hispanic culture, a 1,000+ year old Native American pueblo culture, a highly educated scientific and technical community of federal workers and their families, rural agricultural communities, creative/artistic communities, and political and peace activists. Our Board has either representation from each of these diverse New Mexican sectors or enjoys public comment from these sectors.

Projects that involve such stakeholder-expert exchanges include remediation of an underground chromium plume, continued investigation and remediation associated with a radiation leak at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, the transport of Transuranic Waste off the Los Alamos "Hill," the ultimate disposition of "33 Shafts," currently in place at Los Alamos National Laboratory, and the distilled voice of the citizen for continued and sufficient federal funding each year for responsible clean-up and monitoring of nuclear activities.

Through the NNMCAB's communication venue of regular public meetings, mischaracterization is prevented, public input is incorporated into the official record, and recommendations to the DOE are promulgated.

Scientific and technical experts join the bi-monthly NNMCAB meetings and monthly committee meetings to present and discuss current topics. The availability of these experts and their deeper reference materials is key to the interchange, as is the respectful and patient dialogue that exists between board members and the subject matter experts, both in the public forums and between meetings.

Meetings are professionally organized and orchestrated to maximize the value of the experts' and board members' participation time. The professional format of the meetings ensures maximum learning and relationship-building which fosters effective channels for public dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

The membership of the NNM CAB comes from many communities in several counties around northern New Mexico and represents a variety of backgrounds and interests. Thus, it acts as a conduit between stakeholders and the DOE and provides a formal pathway for citizens to bring concerns to the Department. It is DOE policy that the Environmental Management Site Specific Advisory Board membership provides for gender, educational, economic, and gender diversity. Each board must establish a strong outreach program and recruit members from all segments of its community. To the extent possible, membership should reflect diverse viewpoints in the region and should include primarily individuals or groups who are directly affected by DOE site clean-up activities.

DISCUSSION

Methods

The NNM CAB has a robust outreach program. LANL is situated on the Pajarito Plateau and is surrounded by several communities upstream and downstream of its operation. LANL also shares a boundary with the Pueblo de San Ildefonso. The Pueblos of Santa Clara, Jemez, and Cochiti are also in close proximity of LANL. It is critically important that the stakeholders of these and other communities have a voice in the decision making process for the clean-up at LANL. Consequently, the membership makeup on the NNM CAB is diverse and closely mirrors the U. S. Census data in several categories. Table I shows a breakdown of the current NNM CAB membership.

TABLE I
Current Demographics for the Northern New Mexico Citizens' Advisory Board
January 2015

Education	Geographic Location City (County)	Ethnicity	Gender
A.A.	Ranchos de Taos (Taos)	White	F
B.A., M.S., M.D.	Los Alamos (Los Alamos)	White	F
High School; College	El Dorado (Santa Fe)	White	F
A.A.	Jemez Pueblo (Sandoval)	Native American	M
B.S.	Los Alamos (Los Alamos)	White	F
B.F.A	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	Hispanic	M
B.A.; M.B.A	Espanola (Rio Arriba)	Hispanic	F
High School	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	Hispanic	M
High School	Ranchos de Taos (Taos)	Hispanic	M
B.S. M.B.A.	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	White	M
A.A.	Pojoaque Pueblo (Santa Fe)	Native American	F
High School; College	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	White	F
B.S., M.S.	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	White	M
B.S., M.S., Ph.D.	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	White	M
Law Enforcement Certification	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	White	M
B.A.	San Ildefonso Pueblo (Santa Fe)	Native American	F
B.A.	Santa Fe (Santa Fe)	Hispanic	M
B. S.	Ranchos de Taos (Taos)	Hispanic	M
High School	Albuquerque (Bernalillo)	Hispanic	F
High School	Pojoaque Pueblo (Santa Fe)	Native American	M
B.B.A	Albuquerque (Bernalillo)	Hispanic	M

The diverse NNM CAB membership works collegially toward drafting recommendations to the DOE, Los Alamos Field Office. This process takes thoughtful consideration, always mindful of the area's history, beauty, and legacy. Many members speak thoughtfully of their children and grandchildren and how decisions made today will affect future generations. People in northern New Mexico have very deep roots and are entrenched in their communities. Some have lived in the same home that their great, great, great grandparents lived in. At Taos Pueblo, members live in a village that has been continually inhabited for 1,300 years. They speak the same language as their ancestors and many have rejected modern conveniences such as electricity and running water; many still drawing water from the nearby Rio Pueblo. Contrast this scenario with the work and research being conducted at Los Alamos National Laboratory just 70 miles away. This is the reality and the delicate balance of issues which NNM CAB members consider at every meeting. Without their knowledge of the varied cultures and sensitivities of the region, the NNM CAB members could not represent their communities and the people of northern New Mexico, while deliberating on the complex issues of environmental clean-up at LANL.

Results

Case Study – Remediation of an Underground Chromium Plume at LANL

- A. **The Situation.** Substantial and ever-present concerns about the safety of both ground and surface water that can flow out of the Los Alamos area, especially in light of surrounding communities being *down hill* from Los Alamos, and concerns about natural gravity drawn flows of water with silt, soil, etc. flowing down hill as well as ground water flow eastward to the Rio Grande. Santa Fe citizens concerns are historic, and watchdog groups are well developed and vocal.
- B. **The NNM CAB's Approach.** The CAB seeks to understand 1) the issues and the 2) extent of the public's concern, then to discuss 3) what constitutes meaningful remediation, and then to make 4) recommendations reflecting the background and desired actions.
- C. **Why Diversity Helps the NNM CAB.** When understanding the public's concerns, many on the board are already synced with the deep roots of the commenting public. Board members who are long term rural residents and pueblo residents find many of their pre-existing concerns stated by the public. A key example is the frequent discussion and re-discussion of reasonable timeframes for clean-up and long-term legacy management. Pueblo residents and rural residents of all ethnicities tend to have a much longer timeline in mind, and keep the 100+ year clean-up conversation credible and alive on each and every issue. There is also curiosity and balance when getting into the science behind legacy management of contaminants, as each scenario and substance presents different timeframes. The continuing educational presentations on Chromium 3 and 6 and the pathways to conversion for dangerous hexavalent to trivalent chromium demonstrate this.

The NNM CAB is an amazing avenue in which to allow every-day citizens, who are concerned with the clean-up and management of legacy waste at LANL, an opportunity to provide input from a layman's view. The diversity of the members with roots and history in northern New Mexico, allows for many different perspectives. The diverse views create an effective dialogue regarding each member's ideas of what course of action is the best and enable the board members to "put our heads together" to come to consensus on recommendations for clean-up and management, that are in the best interest of the citizens of northern New Mexico and its future generations.

In its most recent recommendation, the NNM CAB cited its intent to assure resumption of operations at the DOE and LANL for the handling, transport, and disposal of TRU waste (from many generator sites to WIPP), and to establish policies and procedures that would ensure safe and secure operations that would prevent shutdowns of waste disposal operations for an extended period of time. The beauty of this recommendation is that every member was afforded the opportunity to review and provide input before a draft recommendation was presented for a vote. This is the family dynamic of a group working together for the betterment of the community in which we live and in which we have roots and generations of rich culture.

Had there been only a “black and white” approach to the recommendation and had each board member not been given the opportunity to provide their crucial opinion, there would have been an entirely different conclusion. Through human diversity, rather than the scientific approach alone, solutions rendered are more conducive to environmental impact, economic impact, and long term impact on our citizenry and the communities we so richly appreciate and want to protect.¹

CONCLUSION

When a fellow Rotary Club member suggested that I submit an application for the NNM CAB in 2010, I could not have predicted the learning and communications adventure to come. As a former journalist, I have always held the belief that the public is far more intelligent and willing to learn than many news and media outlets might believe. It is this belief that fosters my engagement with my fellow citizen board members and with the many experts that are part of the NNM CAB’s regular meetings.

We are an advisory board and our job is to advise; not to advocate, argue, attack, or evangelize. When it comes to contentious issues, for our beautiful northern New Mexico home, it can be difficult to quell our passions as we learn enough about nuclear waste and transport, water quality, hydrology, chemistry, contracts, budgets, and organizational and federal politics to formulate effective advisory recommendations. But we do. We prepare ourselves by learning from federal and state leadership, from laboratory scientists and engineers, and from the public, about the future of our land, water, and sky. We discuss the issues and come to the best consensus we can build. Then, we create citizen advice for the United States DOE to consider as it makes policy and tactical decisions affecting our home.

It is an honor to participate and serve with my fellow northern New Mexico citizens. We try to help, in some small way, to balance competing interests and to bring our public along the same learning curve that we are on -- as we go beyond the sound bite to discuss nuclear waste remediation, safety, and environmental surveillance in a realistic and informed manner.²

Footnotes

¹ Mona Varela, NNM CAB Member

² Allison Scott Majure, NNM CAB Vice-Chair

REFERENCES

1. DOE EM SSAB Charter, 2014
2. NNM CAB Recommendation 2014-02