COVID-19 YEAR IN REVIEW

Bernalillo County’s Response to a Public Health Emergency

In the face of a deadly and mysterious coronavirus, employees in New Mexico’s largest county rallied together to effectively combat the devastating impacts on the county’s most vulnerable residents while also continuing its day-to-day operations in a virtual environment.
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A Year in Review: COVID-19 Response in Bernalillo County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


These are the words that came to mind as I read the many stories told by Bernalillo County employees in the pages of this report, which had its impetus as the COVID-19 pandemic waxed and waned, and we wanted to ensure our actions in the face of an unprecedented emergency would be memorialized.

As 2022 begins and this report is published, we in New Mexico and across the nation are still in the midst of COVID-19 as cases surge with new Delta and Omicron variants. Our county continues to operate in a state of emergency, albeit to a lesser degree than what we saw in mid- to late-2020. People are still getting ill and dying from the coronavirus, despite the fact that 76% of residents in the State of New Mexico are fully vaccinated, the vaccine is available to all residents 5 years old and older, and 37% of New Mexicans 18 and older have received a booster shot.\(^1\)

In the midst of this latest surge in cases, the county prepares to spend and distribute to eligible segments of the community a new round of federal stimulus money, in the form of America Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funding, which is aimed at helping us continue our response and recovery efforts. As we move forward with ARPA efforts, we should take some time to look back at how we spent an initial infusion of $31.8 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) money to help us respond to COVID-19.

The CARES funding helped us address the pandemic in myriad ways. We knew on March 15, 2020, that we had a lot of work to do and it was a critical situation. COVID-19 had come to our community. It was a Sunday evening, and Emergency Management Director Richard Clark and Deputy County Manager of Public Safety Greg Perez gathered county leaders together. We rolled up our sleeves. We started to understand that we had a long road ahead, though the magnitude and duration of this road was a big unknown.

County employees shifted into gear. We were going to move forward, protect our community to the best of our ability, and do whatever it took to protect and reassure our staff. That meant reinforcing to our staff that not only would we do all we could to keep them safe, but to also reassure them that they would not lose their jobs.

I am proud to say that we did keep our community and employees safe, and all of our employees kept their jobs if they wanted them. The CARES funding helped us to work from

\(^1\) As of 12/21/21. Source: [https://cvvaccine.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html](https://cvvaccine.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html)
home, acquire and distribute personal protective equipment, offer testing, vaccination, and booster clinics, feed, and house vulnerable community members, keep business and construction economies moving, and upgrade technologies to allow customer service functions to continue.

As the stories in these pages tell, I can only marvel and agree with the directors who said, “I thought we had a good team, but the COVID-19 pandemic proved what a dedicated and resilient team we have.”

With the leadership and support of our Board of County Commissioners, we accomplished so much:

- A successful remodel and the move of 800-plus employees into our new, state-of-the-art headquarters at Alvarado Square.
- The purchase of computer monitors, laptops, and keyboards for at least 1,600 employees enabling them to work remotely.
- The continuation of emergency and behavioral services by frontline workers in the Fire, Sheriff’s, Youth Services, Emergency Management, Behavioral Health, Metropolitan Detention Center, Animal Care Services, and 911 emergency dispatch departments.
- The distribution of millions of dollars in business grants and rental assistance to individuals, families, and businesses that faced eviction and closure.
- The distribution of meals, groceries, and fun arts and crafts activities to children and seniors alike, along with community center programming that went virtual.
- The completion of $44 million in construction projects that were already on the drawing boards, despite the challenges of social distancing.
- The processing of thousands of permits that allowed construction, business, and food industries to keep operating.
- The continuous communication with staff and our community about COVID-19, and the media campaigns that urged everyone to stay healthy and to get their shot.
- The acquisition, storage, and distribution of emergency supplies and the assurance that all county employees were trained in how to lessen the COVID-19 risk.
- The cleaning and maintenance of county facilities by diligent custodial crews.

This report highlights all of the amazing things we accomplish when we work together. Were there roadblocks and bumps along the way? No doubt there were many. However, the lessons learned will help us develop a corrective action plan for future difficulties. They also taught us that the county is now more prepared, better trained, and up to any challenge placed before it.

Our county employees have stepped up in a show of trust, support, and respect. They have proved that they are the foundation of this organization - the human infrastructure of Bernalillo County. As this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic continues, I want to thank each and every county employee and elected official for your efforts and for being part of the Bernalillo County team.
INTRODUCTION

An acute respiratory disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, known simply as coronavirus, began circulating around the world in late 2019\(^2\). It made its first appearance in the United States on Jan. 21, 2020, in Washington state. On Jan. 30, the World Health Organization announced the emergence of a “novel Coronavirus Disease 2019” that was contagious and easily spread from one person to another. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services quickly followed suit, declaring a public health emergency. COVID-19 had officially begun.

COVID-19 did not make its official appearance in New Mexico until March 11, when New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced the state’s first presumptive positive case of coronavirus. On March 15, Bernalillo County had five presumptive cases and moved swiftly to react to the pandemic and its ramifications. On that same day, County Manager Julie Morgas Baca followed State of New Mexico directives to close various departments and county buildings at noon and to remain closed through April 15, 2020.

Closing the county in this emergency situation was no easy task and set into gear multiple efforts to manage the crisis. On March 17, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in emergency session and passed Administrative Resolution 2020-29 declaring an emergency area in unincorporated Bernalillo County, which has roughly 110,000 residents who live in rural mountain areas and land grants.

The next day, the county’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) status increased to Level 2, and a fully staffed command and general staff team began regular and direct contact. The EOC would play a critical role in facilitating the flow of requests for supplies and direct allocations from the $31.8 million allocated to Bernalillo County as part of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

For the next 15 months, employees from every division across the county worked tirelessly to address the myriad needs of a community under siege. Within and outside the organization, heroic and innovative efforts were made to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus, including medical and public health expenses, teleworking and safety initiatives for county employees, public safety and public health efforts, and economic stimulus grants to support small businesses, housing, and behavioral health services.

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At the beginning of July 2021, 833 county employees started moving into the new Alvarado Square building. Mask mandates were optional for those who were fully vaccinated. Businesses and restaurants were opening again, and COVID-19 was waning.

“Normal” was short-lived. At the end of July, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revised public health recommendations because of a surge in new cases caused by a Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus that began circulating across the country and causing increases in hospitalizations and COVID-19 cases.

The county, in August, reinstituted a mask mandate and asked departments to initiate A/B employee schedules for 55% occupancy and to help maximize social distancing requirements.

At the beginning of 2022, 75.4% of New Mexico residents were fully vaccinated and nearly 32% had a booster shot. Yet, the virus death toll was not waning (5,866 deaths in New Mexico and 1,338 deaths in Bernalillo County). The pandemic was not over.

For purposes of focusing on CARES Act funding, this report highlights the efforts made during a roughly 15-month time period. From emergency preparedness efforts in the months leading up to March 2020, when stay-at-home orders were initiated, to the expenditure of most CARES Act funding by June 2021, when somewhat normal activities began to resume and employees were back in the office.

The unprecedented efforts made by the county’s leadership team, employees, and elected officials during this extraordinary pandemic should be commemorated. Challenges were met. Lessons were learned. The county’s cumulative efforts exemplify the human spirit and its resiliency in overcoming adversity.

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3 https://vaccinenm.org/public-dashboard.html
4 https://cvprovider.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html
CARES FUNDING: WHERE DID IT GO?

Total Received: $31.8 million

**Economic Stimulus Grants**
- $8.6m – Small Business Grants (844 approved)
- $449k – Behavioral Health Services Grants (69 approved)
- $199k – Housing Support Grants (100 approved)

*Source: Shirley Ragin, Bernalillo County Finance Division*
By June 2020, Bernalillo County had developed a process for vetting and approving requests from departments for emergency purchases using CARES funding. Department requests were coordinated by the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)-Logistics.

Departments would submit ICS 214 resource request forms to the appropriate team lead for the following essential staff function (ESF) areas:

- ESF 2: Information Technology
- ESF 3: Public Works
- ESF 4: Emergency Operations Center (Life Safety)
- ESF 6: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
- ESF 8: Fire & Rescue
- ESF 11: Agriculture and Natural Resources
- ESF 13: Public Safety
- ESF 14: Economic Development
- Other (Legal, Planning, Community Services, Risk Management, Senior and Social Services, Assessors, Communications, Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square)

Resource requests were accompanied by supporting documentation and approved by team leads. When team leads gave approval, requests were advanced to the EOC Logistics team. After approval by the EOC Logistics team, the department was notified to proceed with procurement.

All resource request forms, supporting documentation, and final invoices and receipts were provided to the EOC Finance-Administration team, which developed a system for retaining the documentation for audit purposes.
On Dec. 17, 2021, New Mexico reported 335,617 COVID-19 cases and 5,549 deaths.

Sources: [https://vaccinenm.org/public-dashboard.html](https://vaccinenm.org/public-dashboard.html) and [https://cvprovider.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html](https://cvprovider.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html)
Deputy County Manager and Fire Chief Greg Perez is thoughtful when he is asked to look back at the 15 long months overseeing health and safety during the pandemic and coming up with one hard moment.

“The biggest thing was hoping that what I was doing was the right thing to do,” he said. “I had to trust myself and hoped others trusted me too. It tested me on different levels. It tested me emotionally. It tested me professionally. I tried not to doubt myself, but I was asking the county manager to do pretty big things.”

Perez oversees public health and emergency services and he is quick to tout that his team has one of the highest vaccination rates in the county, with 86% of staff vaccinated. He also is proud of these efforts:

1. Emergency Management staff took the lead in meeting logistical challenges of managing the pandemic, including food distribution and support for testing and vaccination sites.

2. Emergency Communications (911 dispatch) did not skip a beat, and for every one of the 70,000 calls received, dispatchers added COVID-19 questions so responding emergency personnel would be safe.

3. Fire and Rescue personnel adapted to the use of full personal protective equipment on every call and handled nearly 1,600 COVID-19 calls in a 15-month period.

4. The Youth Services Center was “one of the greatest success stories,” Perez said, because YSC had the lowest number of positive cases in the division.
5. Animal Care Services maintained the health and wellbeing of animals despite the huge challenges in staffing and supplies acquisition.


7. Behavioral Health services continued, including the distribution of grants to community providers and keeping the CARE Campus open. At one time, the CARE Campus was the only detox center that was open in the State of New Mexico.

Public Safety Division Staff: Business is Always Open
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT AND EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

It was a Sunday evening, and the COVID-19 virus had made its way into New Mexico just a few days earlier. Emergency Management Director Richard Clark and Deputy County Manager Chief Greg Perez “knew we were in a serious situation” when they called a meeting of the county’s leadership team on March 16, 2020.

Falling back on the 2017 Administrative Instruction (AI) No. EM01, the leadership team was able to quickly coordinate activation of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Bernalillo County had a leg up on the crisis as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) training was a staff requirement. “We were able to identify subject-matter experts and could bring them in, along with existing trained individuals,” Clark said.

For the next 15 months, Clark and the Emergency Management team would provide the big-picture leadership, communication clarity, and organization that helped shape the county’s response to COVID-19.

Top Accomplishments

1. Setting up the EOC in a virtual environment and the ability to conduct government in a virtual environment, from Zoom to Microsoft Teams.
2. Identifying the individuals who had been trained to set up vaccination sites.

The county’s Emergency Operations Center operated in a virtual environment, made possible by the county’s Information Technology Department. The IT Department was critical in enabling county employees to work remotely on whatever task they were assigned.
3. Working with the Communications Services team and understanding the importance of communications in various platforms for the community and staff members.

4. The ability of a well-trained Emergency Management staff to execute the plans in place.

5. The ability to identify what the critical equipment needs were and tap into the CARES money to buy supplies and equipment immediately.

6. Having the support of leadership, including the county manager, deputy county managers, commissioners, and the legal department to let the Emergency Management team do what was needed.

7. Working with the whole community to support testing and vaccination sites.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Working in a virtual environment having never used applications like Teams and Zoom before.

2. Conflicting guidance on mitigating COVID-19 from various sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and federal and state health departments.

3. Not knowing what the county calls essential functions. Who does them? How do they do their jobs? What do they need to continue operations?

4. Logistical procedures were not in place. “The county had not dealt with an emergency on this scale, so at the beginning, there were several hands doing a lot of different things,” Clark said. “While we capitalized on different departments, the weakness was not operating centrally.”

5. County staff were not adequately prepared to understand that during an emergency activation, the normal chain of command is not in place. The EOC becomes the chain of command, and staff were juggling their EOC work with normal jobs.

**COVID-19 TESTING AND VACCINATION SITES**

The biggest success for the Office of Emergency Management was the level of support that the county provided to testing and vaccination sites. Said Clark: “Every year, we’d bring in the vaccination clinic training. We trained park and rec employees on how to set up the clinics and run them, including signage. All of a sudden, they are saying, ‘We are so glad you made us go to training!’”

**Vaccination Site Support** incorporated multiple partners, several sites, and mobile strategies.
This included community shot clinics, the activation of county points of distribution (PODs), and the support from the following county sections and departments:

- Fire & Rescue leadership and staff administered vaccinations and emergency medical services.
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space staff provided services as guides, scribes, recovery room monitors, registration staff, and site support.
- Public Works employees provided traffic control.
- Emergency Operations Center staff provided registration and site support.
- Sheriff’s Office deputies provided security.
- Other volunteers from various county departments, including elected leaders, helped as scribes, registration, and site support.

**Support locations:** Raymond G. Sanchez Community Center, National Hispanic Cultural Center, and Vista Grande Community Center.

**County-Run Vaccination Sites:** Raymond G. Sanchez Community Center, National Hispanic Cultural Center, Westside Community Center, Metropolitan Detention Center, the CARE Campus, and Vista Grande (Tijeras) Community Center.

**Mobile Vaccination Clinics:** County supported efforts by FEMA at Las Estancias Shopping Center and Westside Community Center.

**Support Jobs:** Vaccinators, scribes support, site support activities, medical standby, traffic control, law enforcement standby, and telephone registration support.

In addition, Bernalillo County staff provided support three to four days a week to the Department of Health EXPO NM site with vaccinators, medical standby, traffic control,
scribes, and various site supplies, such as traffic cones.

**Partners:** N.M. Department of Health, Vida Pharmacy, Walgreens, National Hispanic Cultural Center, N.M. National Guard, and Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

![Inside the National Hispanic Cultural Center's recovery room, where Clark gives instructions to volunteers. The National Hispanic Cultural Center was a critical partner in efforts to vaccinate thousands of residents.](image)

Before, during, and after vaccines were available, the county provided support to drive-through testing locations.

![Before, during, and after vaccines were available, the county provided support to drive-through testing locations.](image)
The National Hispanic Cultural Center (above) was laid out to accommodate a smooth and orderly flow of traffic and citizens seeking their vaccinations. Staffed by partners such as Bernalillo County Fire & Rescue, Vida Pharmacy and Walgreens (right), as many as 500 people were served during each clinic. Vaccines made by Moderna (below) and Pfizer were administered.
COVID-19 BOOSTER AND VACCINATION CLINICS

In November of 2021, the Office of Emergency Management went into high gear – again – to organize COVID-19 vaccine and booster clinics at county locations and the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

News of a surge in COVID-19 cases and new variants of COVID-19, named Delta and Omicron, propelled a renewed interest in booster shots. Clark said it took just a few days to fill the 1,000 available slots at a Dec. 3 booster clinic. A total of 1,200 people got a booster or vaccination at the event, he said.

“That’s what the demand is out there,” Clark told KRQE-Channel 13. “That’s what the need is out there” to fill up all the slots so quickly.

In addition to booster and vaccine clinics for the general public, several booster and vaccine clinics were held for county employees and their dependents. In fact, by January 2022, all residents 5 years old and older were eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.
EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

An emergency dispatch services employee must have tough skin because the job is not a walk in the park. During the COVID-19 pandemic, dispatchers handled on a daily basis 911 emergency calls that required patience and calm responses. The pandemic was especially taxing on the team.

As Director Lee Thompson explained: “At the height of COVID cases, the call volume increased. The lack of patience from the public was more evident. Obviously, this was a strain on the dispatchers because they’re getting more calls. During these times, there was not enough time to regenerate. You’re going on and on. You come in the same time every day, and day to day, it’s the same thing.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Maintaining operations without any downtime.

2. Deploying a backup dispatch trailer to house three or four dispatchers in case there was an outbreak and the team had to move to an alternate location.

3. Maintaining the health of staff despite the closeness of the dispatchers’ consoles. Social distancing could not always be kept as dispatchers work closely together and talk to each other when organizing callouts. Despite the close quarters, the team had very few outbreaks of illness.

4. Protecting first responders with specific COVID-19 questions to the callers: “Have you been exposed to anyone with COVID-19? “Is there anybody in the household who has COVID-19?” “Have you ever tested positive for COVID-19? If so, when?”

Emergency Dispatch personnel communicates with the public on its Facebook page on April 15, 2020.
Biggest Challenges

1. The public did not like to be asked COVID-19 questions.
   
   “We had to be more customer-service focused because we are jumping from one 911 call to another,” Thompson said. “We got a lot of questions, ‘Why are you asking me this?’ ‘You shouldn’t be asking me this.’ We had to put the caller at ease: ‘We’re not trying to violate your constitutional rights. We’re trying to keep our team safe and you safe.’”

2. Maintaining a healthy environment for the safety of employees working closely together.

3. The need for constant communication among dispatch, sheriff, fire, and emergency management as COVID-19 information changed, and then sharing that information with personnel through memos and policy changes on service calls.

4. The FEMA documentation forms and the equations used to fill them out, especially the activity log, known as an ICS 214.

   “You learned on the fly,” Thompson said. “Sometimes education and training weren’t always there, so you had to dig and call a few people to find the answers. I felt like I was back in college calculus class! They were my least favorite thing to accomplish during this pandemic, but I got pretty good at it.”

911 Calls by the Numbers

67,000: Number of 911 calls in the year prior to March 2020, when the outbreak began.

70,000: Number of 911 calls during the height of the pandemic (March-Dec. 2020).

“I felt like I was back in college calculus class!”

Director Lee Thompson, on the FEMA forms and equations

Emergency dispatchers always work 24-7. However, during the pandemic, they saw an increase in 911 calls. Despite an inability to social distance, the team had little problems with illness and outbreaks.
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a nationwide shortage of N95 masks led to what the New York Times labeled in a November 2020 article as a “chaotic, cutthroat gray market” to acquire the life-saving personal protective equipment (PPE).

This shortage of N95 masks and other necessary PPE is cited as one of Fire & Rescue’s main challenges during the pandemic. It even led to the decision to be ready to send a team of two with a rental truck to a Los Angeles dock to meet a shipping container that carried the precious cargo. (Thankfully, that never had to happen.)

“We went to great lengths to get PPE,” Chief Deputy Zachary Lardy said. “It was incredible how Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs played out in the department. We worried about making sure our people don’t die. We made sure to keep them alive. We made sure you don’t let them get sick.”

When personnel did get exposed to the virus, there were hotel rooms where they could go during their quarantine so as to keep their families safe.

“The question facing our staff: Do I go home or do I take advantage of the quarantine hotel?” Chief Perez said. “Some remained in the hotel throughout their sickness; some stayed until they got their negative results, which could take up to seven days at the height of the pandemic. This was time away from their families.”

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Between March 17, 2020, and June 23, 2021, Fire & Rescue personnel responded to 1,679 COVID-19 related calls. The call volume – and the department’s health – mirrored the community’s health, Lardy said.

For example, when COVID-19 cases escalated in the community, they did so within the department.

One particular tough time that Lardy remembers is “one night shutting down two 911 response units because we had so many people out quarantined or tested positive.”

Thanksgiving week was especially difficult, Lardy said. A COVID-19 update Lardy compiled for the week of Nov. 22, 2020, showed 12 employees diagnosed with COVID-19 and 20 employees quarantined.

“That week was our worst,” he said. “We had to call people back from home/vacation daily. We couldn’t find people to come to work. Or they were sick, off on leave, already working, quarantining.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Maintaining the equivalent level of service delivery throughout the pandemic to what it was before, despite the challenges associated with COVID-19.
2. Managing additional duties, such as testing and vaccination administration.
3. All employees who contracted COVID-19 fully recovered.
4. Minimizing the risk of employees exposing their family members to the virus.
5. Securing hotel rooms for first responders.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Maintaining staffing levels throughout the pandemic.
2. Providing adequate PPE to personnel.
3. Risk to families. “Your entire career, you know you’re going to be exposed to stuff at work that can put yourself at risk,” Lardy said. “You make a conscious decision to do a job that puts your health and safety behind the health and safety of the public. (COVID) changed the dynamic. This not only put yourself but your family’s safety at risk. That was the difference between COVID and anything else up to now.”

4. Fire & Rescue personnel live together, so reducing risk of exposure was difficult. “Every time someone is exposed to COVID, a lot of people are at risk simply because they live in close quarters,” Lardy said.
SHERIFF’S OFFICE

Like all emergency personnel, the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office had to evolve and adapt in order to continue operations during the pandemic, despite the dangers that the coronavirus posed to staff.

“Our calls for service remained the same,” said Deputy Chief Joshua Campos. “We can’t decline our calls for services. We had to maintain that level of service despite restrictions.”

Campos said the top accomplishment of the Sheriff’s Office was its ability to maintain efficiency and service to customers, not only in the area of law enforcement, but with its community engagement and training and recruitment efforts.

In fact, the Sheriff’s Office managed to do the following, on top of its priority to respond to emergency calls:

1. Virtual hiring and recruitment efforts.
2. Two Regional Basic Training Academy class graduations.
3. Numerous efforts to provide food, toys, and needed supplies to many community members who were in need.
4. Support to the Clerk’s Office and the Office of Community Engagement.
5. Support to Albuquerque Public Schools and the state Children, Youth, and Families Department during Operation Educational Achievement.
6. Support to COVID-19 patients who needed transport by the Metro Air Support Unit.
8. Implementation of body-worn cameras.
9. Opening the Las Estancias Community Substation.

The efforts speak to Campos’ observation that the Sheriff’s Office staff were “able to overcome a large amount of adversity and adapt to varying degrees of changes relatively easily.”
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Top Accomplishments

1. Continued service to the community.

2. Ensuring the safety of all staff through education and the use of personal protective equipment as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

   “A lot of the credit goes to Richard Clark and the Office of Emergency Management,” Campos said. “What helped us was our working relationship with Clark and OEM. We know them. We could ask them questions.”

3. Mitigating the negative impacts to work processes caused by other providers who changed hours and contact protocols.

   “We maintained a 24-hour daily operation,” Campos said. “It was hard because the DA, public defender, New Mexico court, district court – they all went remote. But we were able to attend court hearings on the phone, and we were successful in not impacting our bottom line.”

Biggest Challenges

1. Ensuring all staff had IT technology – and associated training to operate it - for remote work.

2. Ensuring all Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-related forms were completed accurately and submitted in a timely manner. “We were often asked to fill out the forms without any direction,” Campos said.

3. Keeping up-to-date with varying and often changing regulations, best practices, protocols, administrative instructions, and directives related to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Community Service Partnership allowed Sheriff’s Office deputies to deliver more than 1,000 boxes of food and supplies to needy families between March and May of 2020.
The COVID-19 pandemic did not hamper efforts to recruit, hire, and train new deputies. Class #41 of the Regional Basic Training Academy graduated in July 2020 in a virtual ceremony (above). Class #42 graduated in May 2021. Recruitment efforts, including a Women in Law Enforcement Seminar (left) continued throughout the pandemic.

Gang Recognition Identification and Patrol (GRIP)
July 2020 through February 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of positive business and person contacts</th>
<th># of traffic stops</th>
<th># of felony arrests</th>
<th># of misdemeanor arrests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1118</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GRIP results in a seven-month period.
METROPOLITAN DETENTION CENTER

There were many COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges for the roughly 465 employees at the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), the largest jail in the State of New Mexico. With nearly 18,000 individuals who were booked into the MDC in 2020, the protocols and procedures – and associated costs – to mitigate the virus spread in the facility were staggering.

MDC Chief Greg Richardson cites as his team’s greatest accomplishment the extensive coordination of protocols and procedures to keep staff and inmates safe. “The groups here at MDC: security personnel, facilities, contractors, finance, social services, classification, records, public records, correctional technicians – all of our groups – they all towed the line and held the burden,” he said.

The burden was overwhelming. Despite the MDC population decreasing during the pandemic, Richardson highlighted how retaining and maintaining staff levels – already a challenge in normal times – was heightened in the midst of fears surrounding an unknown virus.

Notwithstanding the needs of an overworked staff and the inmates who tested positive during the pandemic, there were other details that needed to be worked out to ensure staff and inmates in the facility’s 36 pods were as safe as possible:

- Meals and backup plans if kitchen staff had to quarantine or got sick.
- Personal protective equipment.
- Testing procedures.
- Quarantining procedures.
- Contact tracing.
- Coordination with outside law enforcement agencies and health departments.
- Ensuring inmates received right to counsel and right to hearings.

Richardson is especially proud of the proven protocols and procedures that limited the spread of COVID-19 among staff and inmates.

A study released in June 2021 reported 80,963 cases of COVID-19 among prison staff at U.S. prison systems and said that “correctional staff – including correctional officers, correctional healthcare workers, and other administrative/clerical staff – are at high risk for occupational infections, which can spread to their social networks outside of work.”

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6 https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-11077-0
The MDC’s prevention protocols helped. Among MDC staff, a mere 11% tested positive for the virus from March of 2020 to October 2021. Among inmates, the percentage of positive tests was 7% (Figure 1).

One of the challenges of mitigating COVID-19 at MDC was contact tracing, Richardson said.

“If we had an officer, staff, or inmate who got a positive test, the contact tracing was going back and looking at movements of that individual,” he said. “They were bringing them into the facility. How does law enforcement or the prisoner transport unit transport someone who is positive to MDC? How do we coordinate with them and notify them if a prisoner is positive or was in close contact with someone who tested positive?”

Richardson instituted daily briefings for COVID-19 pandemic-related information and security. “That really helped. It pushed information down, and it was an opportunity to ask questions,” he said. Everyone with an operational role attended the briefings on topics of concern.

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Surviving and managing the COVID-19 surge of positive cases in October 2020.

2. Development of several processes with partners, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state Department of Health, and the medical contractor Centurion, for testing, observation pods, personal protective equipment distribution, and contact tracing.
3. Providing staff with assistance as needed, including leave.

4. Coordination with outside law enforcement agencies.

5. Overcoming the learning curve. “It was like being fed from a firehose,” Richardson said. “We use the ADDIE process to look at the problem: Analyze the problem, design a plan, develop the plan, implement it and evaluate it.”

6. Working with courts to ensure inmates got their hearings. “We were holding court for 33 counties,” Richardson said.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Adapting to the constantly changing COVID-19 protocols.

2. Low morale and trying to maintain and retain MDC staff in the face of overtime, worry, burnout, and stress. “At the beginning, there was no relief factor,” Richardson said.

**Total # of Bookings at MDC**

**# of Virtual Court Hearings**
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DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

At one point during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARE Campus - operated by the Department of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) - was the only detox facility in the State of New Mexico that remained open.

“People die from detox every single day. It was a top priority for us,” said Director Margarita Chavez Sanchez, who called this consistency of care her team’s top accomplishment during the pandemic.

Like other public safety departments, the DBHS staff are front-line employees who offer direct services to clients. Chavez Sanchez said this one-on-one customer service model made it difficult for her and her team to navigate the uncertainty and the risk associated with the COVID-19 virus.

During one particularly challenging time, Chavez Sanchez said, seven staff members were out because of positive test results.

“As a leader, that was rough,” she said.

Chavez Sanchez credits her staff for the ability to rally around each other when times became especially rough. In fact, the team lifted each other by creating a “wellness basket” program for each other. When a staffer got sick, team members would drop a wellness basket on their doorsteps and call them.

“It brought us together,” Chavez Sanchez said. “We cried in the office together. … Taking care of each other gave us an opportunity to bond as a family. That in and of itself is invaluable.”

Top Accomplishments

1. The ability to maintain operations during the pandemic. Chavez Sanchez said DBHS had to reduce the numbers of clients served because of social distancing, but “we stayed open.”

2. The distribution of $448,516 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
(CARES) funding to 48 behavioral health providers, who in turn, were able to provide services to 21,487 community members and 487 employees in the behavioral health workforce. Each grant was for an amount up to $10,000 per provider.

“Providers in the community had major issues staying open, such as paying staff, telehealth costs, etc.,” Chavez Sanchez said. “Being able to follow the model that Economic Development gave us, we were able to put out grants to providers.”

3. Securing a partnership with the City of Albuquerque and the State of New Mexico to provide funding to Central Desert Behavioral Health Hospital, which opened a wing for behavioral health clients who tested positive for COVID-19 and did not have insurance coverage. The total cost of $400,000 was split among the three entities: $100,000 by Bernalillo County, $100,000 by the City of Albuquerque, and $200,000 by the State of New Mexico, Chavez Sanchez said.

4. The support by DBHS staff of early voting and election day sites, and the distribution of masks on the CARE Campus.

5. DBHS, the Emergency Operations Center, and Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) Title I McKinney-Vento Program partnered to support families who were newly unhoused, precariously housed, or temporarily displaced as a result of COVID-19. Through this collaboration, DBHS provided a three-month motel voucher to ensure that families had a safe place to stay. APS social workers worked directly with families to establish housing stability, and DBHS distributed $133,523 in CARES funding to support these motel vouchers through this collaboration.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Staffing levels during the pandemic that continue to have ramifications for the department today. “If we have an exposure here, we go into quarantine,” Chavez Sanchez said. “It was difficult maintaining adequate staffing levels as well as making sure that no one is being put in an unsafe space.”

2. Limited resources in the community. Many outside service providers shut down, or they required negative COVID tests, or they were not accepting new clients during the pandemic, Chavez Sanchez said.

3. DBHS is bracing for what Chavez Sanchez calls the “fourth wave” of the pandemic -- or the behavioral health wave -- with “increased thoughts of suicide, increased substance use and dependence due to the trauma of the last few years and delayed access to care.” Nationwide, Chavez Sanchez said, behavioral health providers are preparing for the increased behavioral health needs in the community, and “we stand ready to do our part.”
YOUTH SERVICES CENTER

The numbers tell the story. In a 17-month period, between May 2020 through October 2021, the Youth Services Center (YSC) administered 1,174 COVID-19 tests. Its average positivity rate: A mere 2.5%. This despite the fact that detention centers had a higher risk of infection.

Assistant Director Keryl Work and Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Administrator Carmela Romero tout robust safety measures for such a low infection rate in a high-risk environment. The YSC began preparing for these measures in late February and had developed by the time stay-at-home orders were issued in mid-March:

- Coronavirus training for all staff and residents.
- Infection Control Plan and training for all staff and residents.
- A YSC Pandemic Policy.
- A verbal screening and temperature check process at the only entrance to remain open; and
- Flyers and resource sheets for parents and guardians.

“I think we did an outstanding job developing a screen with our doctors at UNM,” Work said, emphasizing how important the medical director was in assisting staff in developing new ways to do their work inside the facility.

“Staff supervision was challenging and difficult,” she said. “There was a lack of activity. The kids couldn’t go eat in the cafeteria. Our staff did a phenomenal job of trying to do activities outside. They would eat outside, get fresh air. That was imperative.”

The Community Custody Program (CCP) staff was also impacted. Field visits dropped significantly because of restrictions. Despite the inability of CCP officers to have normal face-to-face field contact, the staff was able to maintain public safety by developing alternatives:

- CCP officers were able to face time, call several times a day, and monitor GPS at all times.
- Youth and families utilized the on-call crisis phone if they needed any assistance.
- When CCP officers were in the field, they were protected with full personal protective equipment (PPE) and would meet the youth outside of their residence.
Despite the challenges, Work and Romero applauded the YSC staff members. “They are the definition of public service,” Romero said. “They gave their all.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Minimal staff and resident exposure to COVID-19.
2. Development of the Infection Control Plan, entrance screening, pandemic policy, and training on all of these with staff, youth, and their families.
3. Communication with staff and families. “We trained all the kids on the same things we trained the staff on,” said Work.
4. The ability to connect youth to online schools, programming, family visitations, and court hearings.
5. An adequate supply of PPE.

Biggest Challenges

1. The Federal Emergency Management Agency activity logs, or ICS 214 forms.
2. Staff supervision of youth.
3. Lack of mental health services and the need for case managers to ensure youth without technology were still in compliance. “When released into the community, our mental health providers were not prepared for online counseling,” Romero said. “There was a waitlist.”
4. Behavioral Health team was a direct-care team, and as such, they never got a break. “There is only three of them,” Work said. “They never could work from home and there is no telemedicine for the kids. They were doing the mental health assessments right at booking.”
Youth Services Center staff tout their communications with each other, youth, and families as a major team accomplishment.
Like shelters nationwide during the COVID-19 pandemic, Animal Care Services staff grappled with an increased interest in pet adoptions. “There was a huge interest in animals and people were crazy for adoptions,” said Danette Gonzales, special projects coordinator.

Staff had to get creative. Their doors were closed to the public, and so they created online forms. “That was a big deal,” Gonzales said. “To be able to serve the public with licensing, adoptions, reclaims. All of our procedures had to move to online format. We developed online documents for adoptions, setting up an appointment, or putting a relinquishment file online so the owner could fill it out and have it delivered to us.”

The phones rang off the hook. “I would get up in the morning, and my phone would start at 7 a.m.,” Gonzales said. “We left voice messages and text messages. The texting was instant communication and it was all the time. People would ask questions, ‘Tell me about Gary.’ I was constantly texting with constituents.”

The staff’s dedication to answering and returning phone calls was appreciated by the public, Gonzales said. “We were answering phones into the night, returning phone calls and messages to ensure we had contact with people,” she said. “We did a really good job of that. The feedback we received from the public, ‘Oh! I got in touch with someone!’ We were a voice, someone to talk to.”

Director Misha Goodman also lauds enforcement officers for not skipping a beat in ensuring all service calls from citizens were being managed, from loose dogs, found dogs, compliance, and welfare checks. Officers also tried to reduce citizen contacts at the shelter by encouraging the “Foster in Field” program.

“We did our best to have people assist us. If you find a dog, try to find the owner to prevent us from having to pick animals up,” Goodman said. “People were home anyway. We’d ask people if they would foster the animal. We’d find the owner, and the owner would never have to come to the facility.”

Finally, with reduced hours and many staff members working from home, the use of vibrant social media messaging kept the public informed of the hundreds of animals needing new homes.
Top Accomplishments

1. Online business transactions.
2. Maintaining contact with the public through online forms and health fairs.
3. Enforcement of animal ordinances.
4. Creative solutions that allowed the public to adopt animals, including delivering animals to their new adopted owners.
5. Developing quarantine protocols for animals exposed to COVID-19.

Biggest Challenges

1. Staffing limitations and decreased morale among employees who had to be onsite to do their jobs.
2. COVID-19 information kept changing.
3. The fear of having a lot of staff members – especially care technicians – get sick with coronavirus at the same time. The center struggled with how to have a backup group of trained individuals who could care for the animals.
4. Acquiring supplies, such as animal food and disinfecting products. “We were going from store to store, using the credit card, to get our food and Clorox because of purchasing limits,” Gonzales said.
5. Lack of training on technology tools, such as Ring Central and Windows Teams.
6. Inability to reach staff members in other departments by phone.

Facebook and Twitter, along with several TV news stories, helped raise awareness during the pandemic about animals in need and the people who care for them.
PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION: LESSONS LEARNED

Training:

- Continuous emergency training needs to happen. Tabletop exercises to practice lessons learned and joint training sessions are valuable for future emergency preparedness.
- The need for a contingency Emergency Operations Center (EOC) team, or a “backup bench” of employees who also receive continuous emergency training to accommodate staff turnover in the EOC and burnout of main EOC group.
- Formalize training for all EOC reporting, such as the activity logs, or ICS 214 forms.
- Ensure understanding for the documentation requirements. Train backup bench to do the EOC reporting.
- Training of a backup support team for directors/leaders so directors/leaders can take time off in the midst of an emergency.

Essential Functions/Workers:

- Identification of essential functions and essential workers to determine which employees need to continue working, what they need to do their job, who gets vaccinations first, etc.
- The recognition that MDC and Animal Services are also public safety personnel.
- There is no effort that sets front-line emergency personnel in the pandemic apart from everyone else. As a county, what is above and beyond the call of duty? How can the county show appreciation for these individuals who went above and beyond at the risk of their own health and safety? How does the county identify such employees?
- Medical personnel at detention centers and determination of their needs.
- Clarify EOC daily meeting attendees. Who are they? What departments should be involved? Should all department directors be in EOC daily briefings?
- EOC meetings could be made more efficient. Example: Each essential staff function might offer updates to one designated staff member, who compiles information for the team so the EOC director may distribute only information that is relevant to all team members on the call.

Protocols/Policies:

- Review the EOC requirement to report illness. How are requirements enforced? Can they be? Should there be disciplinary action for lack of reporting?
- Establish a better way to inform staff when there is an exposure in a work site.

Communication:

- Communication between EOC and departments should be streamlined for more clear directions as to who to contact for various emergency needs.
- Daily and weekly briefings work.
• Microsoft Teams works better than WebEx.

Staffing:

• Consider staffing shortages in departments. Reassign staff who can’t do their jobs at home or onsite to fill such shortages. Shortages resulted in supervisors who could not enforce administrative instructions that required exposed employees to stay home.
• Consider activation of an in-house counseling team available to departments.
• Consider backup bench for public safety liaison or pull the liaison from regular duties to focus on EOC work.

Technology:

• Anticipate training needs for new technology and who needs it. Ensure uniformity so that department leads can train co-workers in such technologies.
• Update Outlook staff directory to include work cell phones for immediate contact with Human Resources in an emergency.

Equipment/Supplies:

• Supply chain resiliency related to any emergency needs to be a focus. One supplier is not adequate. Running out of personal protective equipment cannot be an option.
• Centralize department inventory needs and ensure adequate space to have large contingency of supplies and equipment, especially in departments such as Animal Care Services and MDC.
Shirley Ragin always kept two goals in mind throughout the COVID-19 crisis: Make an impact on the community and help employees. As the fiscal overseer of $31.8 million in CARES relief funding, these two goals were at the forefront of every decision made about how to spend the money.

Surprisingly, the county received the money only because Ragin was persistent.

“Our federal lobbyist, John O’Donnell told me, ‘I think the county can get some of this money. I have no idea how you get it though!’” Ragin recalled. “So, I told (County Manager Julie Morgas Baca), ‘I am going to apply for us.’ I went to the website, gathered data, and reached out to Treasury. Lo and behold, I get an email back with instructions on how to fill out the application for CARES funding!”

Ragin highlights the success of distributing the CARES funding expeditiously to two events: The county receiving a direct payment of CARES funding (small counties had to get their allocation through the state), and the Board of County Commissioners giving emergency powers to County Manager Julie Morgas Baca.

“(Commissioners) gave us the ability to be agile in putting processes in place to get the CARES money out the door as quickly as we could,” Ragin said. In addition, Ragin and her team had the foresight to invest a portion of the funding, earning an additional $5,000 in interest that was used to purchase personal protective equipment.

In addition to helping departments countywide get the money they needed, the Information Technology Department ensured employees would be able to work remotely. That effort culminated with the purchase of laptops and associated hardware that enabled nearly 1,700 employees to work from home.

Throughout it all, Ragin gave special attention to her team’s welfare. “I was always worried most about my directors,” she
said. “How they were doing mentally was a concern, and I checked on them regularly. They are all dedicated and I wanted to make sure they weren’t falling apart from the pressures.”

From a county department standpoint, spending the money – once approved – was easy. However, on the front end, interpreting CARES guidelines by reading the Treasury Department’s 151-page rule book was a challenge, said Pamela Moon, then-director of Accounting and Budgeting.

“It took a lot of reading through the guidance and interpreting the guidance to ensure we understood the rules,” Moon said.

In addition, Ragin’s finance team had to develop the processes and procedures for how departments would make requests and how the team would need to reconcile labor and nonlabor expenditures in order to withstand scrutiny in external and internal audits. As the fiscal year 2020-21 ended, every penny had been encumbered, and all funding was depleted by Sept. 30, 2021.

Despite CARES expenditures being depleted, the work of Ragin and her team was not over in the fall of 2021. “We need to wrap up everything. There are final reports and the next challenge is the external audit of expenditures,” Ragin said.

Deputy County Manager Shirley Ragin (pictured above - first row, third from left) volunteered at every vaccination clinic on Saturday. “How can I not do that?” she said. “They (staff and volunteers) inspired me so much because of their friendliness. It was a mental release for me.”
Top Accomplishments

1. The Information Technology Department’s ability to acquire good equipment so county staff members could work from home.
2. The distribution of CARES funding to departments in a timely manner.
3. The work of the Emergency Operations Center-Finance and Administration team, which developed processes for tracking and reconciling all CARES funds expenditures.
4. Working with the Human Resources Department to ensure CARES administrative leave was provided to employees who could not work because of the COVID-19 virus.
5. The final reports that were completed successfully each quarter, and the wrap-up reporting that is currently in process.

Biggest Challenges

1. Understanding and interpreting the CARES funding rules for expenditures and the associated work to get the funding dispersed, such as setting up accounts, working with the U.S. Treasury Department, and investing some of the funds to earn interest.
2. Reporting and documenting expenditures.
   “Every quarter, an OIG (Office of Inspector General) report was due,” Ragin said. “We were reporting our expenditures on the grant solutions reporting module. We got all of our reports submitted and accepted through June 30, 2021.”
3. Coordination with other governmental agencies.
   Ragin cites the challenges of coordinating with city and state officials to expand services for Behavioral Health Department clients who tested positive for COVID-19.
4. Keeping up with internal order requests that came in from all across the county.
ACCOUNTING & BUDGET DEPARTMENT

How many of us know how to use an Excel spreadsheet so readily as to be able to create pivot charts that tell a $31.8 million story that will pass muster with federal auditors? On top of that, how many of us can look at an Excel sheet with 2,700 rows of data that can be sorted and filtered in numerous ways - and not get dizzy?

Accounting and Budget Director Jackie Sanchez and her team are the experts who stand steady in the face of a monstrous Excel. In the case of CARES funding and being accountable for it, Sanchez directed her team to develop and utilize such complex Excel spreadsheets.

Sanchez said: “I know how things flow through the system. I wanted to ensure that we were compliant in regard to an audit. My concern was compliancy with the Office of Inspector General, external auditors, and with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).”

On top of these concerns and her two roles as then-assistant accounting director and deputy chief of the Emergency Operations Center-Finance and Administration section, Sanchez managed her team, which still had to do their regular jobs, including year-end financials and audits and the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

In March, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Bernalillo County, Sanchez and her staff began tracking labor and non-labor costs in accordance with FEMA rules. Among the many FEMA reporting forms were the ICS 214 activity log and the state Force Account Labor Summary Record. Many department directors did not like the complicated forms, but they were valuable to Sanchez and her team, who used them to account for the percentage of time – and the monetary value of that time – that could be reimbursed by the FEMA.

Then, at the end of March, the president signed the CARES Act, and the Treasury Department produced new rules and procedures for accounting for CARES relief funding. Sanchez had to modify many documents and protocols.

Top Accomplishments

1. Development of processes and stringent reconciliation on the labor and nonlabor side.
2. Development of processes for reporting expenses for labor and non-labor.
4. Tracking the county budget, where it stood, and every cumulative expenditure.
5. Communicating all processes with the staff and department directors.

Biggest Challenges

1. Juggling CARES-related labor with regular job duties.
2. Various timekeeping systems that had unique reporting mechanisms and forcing each of them to be consistent for reporting.
3. Having to develop additional pay codes to allow for employee hours to be recorded correctly.
5. Lack of preparedness in advance to bring in contract labor so staff is not stretched too thin.

Who Remembers These Forms?
Many county employees might not have been aware of a group of fewer than 30 staff from across the county who came together weekly to prepare and coordinate emergency contracts and purchases that needed to be made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On paper, spending $31.8 million in CARES relief money looked easy. At the front and back end of the spending were time-consuming processes that would ensure external audits of the expenditures would meet FEMA and U.S. Treasury Department stipulations. The Emergency Operations Center-Finance/Administration Section was a group of individuals who:

- Developed an approval process that started with a 213-RR (213 Resource Request) form.
- Tracked a request for CARES funding through the various levels of department leadership approvals.
- Tracked the purchase order, shopping cart, goods received, and final receipts for each expenditure.
- Created portfolios for every single expenditure for auditing purposes; and
- Ensured monthly accounting reports would be submitted to the Office of Inspector General.

Timothy Olivas, a special projects coordinator in the Accounting and Budget Department, was tasked with the role of section chief of the EOC-Finance and Administration team. A good portion of the team came from the Finance and General Services divisions. Other team members came from departments all over the county, and Olivas said the team’s biggest accomplishment was the team itself.

“Number One, the team we put together was all volunteers, and Number Two, everybody maintained their regular full-time jobs and took on the additional responsibilities of managing the response to COVID-19, which was an unparalleled response,” Olivas said. “The resilience and adaptability that the team had … was dynamic. The team kept performing and exceeding my expectations and doing a great job for the county and the community.”

Top Accomplishments

1. The staff. At the beginning, it was a core of eight employees. It grew to 27 members at the height of the crisis. The team was largely disbanded in June of 2021, and only a few Accounting staff members remained to wrap up reports.

2. Supporting the field workers – all the first responders and county elements responding to the pandemic, whether that was nursing homes, testing, vaccinations, and
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closure/reopening of county buildings, to name a few. The team supported the field operations with personnel resources, supplies, equipment, personal protective equipment, vehicles, and meals.

3. Evolving continually from a very unclear objective at the beginning. “We weren’t sure where we were going, but we gave it everything we had,” Olivas said.

4. Collaboration with the IT Department, an integral part of the EOC, which helped the EOC operate remotely.

5. Compilation of a “lessons learned” document that received input from every individual on the EOC-Finance and Administration team.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. The lack of plans and procedures at the beginning.
   
   “We wanted to do it right,” Olivas said. “We wanted to support the field. We wanted to stand up to an audit and OIG (Office of Inspector General). There were lots of challenges and we didn’t know, so we set it up as we went along.”

2. Turnover on the team and getting new members trained. Olivas himself was a key asset in training new members in their roles on the team.
   
   “At each step, you had to take the time to train them up with what they needed to know and get them access, equipment and knowledge,” Olivas said. “I didn’t want to pass that off to someone in the team. I took that on to do that.
   
   “I kind of regretted that sometimes because it took so much time to do that,” he said. “But I got to know a bunch of great people. I learned in the process and every time I trained someone, I learned something.”

3. The logistical challenges in the finance area between purchasing, acquiring, and accounting for supplies and equipment.

Tim Olivas led EOC-Finance meetings that were held three times a week during the height of the pandemic. The EOC-Finance team was largely disbanded in June 2021, with just a few Accounting staff members wrapping up final reports.
Following the Paper Trail

Where’s the approval? Where’s the Shopping Cart form? Where’s the Goods Received form? Where are the receipts? For the county employees who worked on the EOC-Finance/Administration Section, these were the questions that were asked for every purchase made with CARES funding.

The Accounting Department knew it would need to have all supporting documents to justify each CARES expense for internal, state, and federal auditing purposes. If an expenditure did not meet CARES funding criteria, the county would be at risk of having to reimburse the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

For each purchase, team members had to create a portfolio that would document and substantiate the entire purchase. The PDF portfolio consisted of:

1. The 213 RR (Resource Request) form and supporting documentation, such as quotes for the purchase to be made.
2. Email approvals for the purchase.
3. Purchase Order.
4. Shopping Cart.
5. Goods Received; and
6. Invoice (or receipt if the purchase was made by credit card).

Gathering all the documentation for each purchase was time-consuming and led team members down very long paper trails. So how many portfolios were created by the team? In goods/supplies purchases alone:

1. Economic Development: 1
2. ESF 2 (Information Technology): 35
3. ESF 3 (Public Works): 20
4. ESF 4 (Emergency Operations Center): 48
5. ESF 6 (Parks, Rec, and Open Space): 25
6. ESF 8 (Fire & Rescue): 44, and hundreds of FEMA forced labor equipment portfolios
7. ESF13 (Public Safety – BCSO, Behavioral Health, MDC, and YSC): 105
8. Other: 16

Total: 294 portfolios
There is nothing like a pandemic to force people into the 21st century. When the county’s stay-at-home order was activated on March 24, 2020, it was up to the county’s Information Technology Department to kick into action and try to find laptops and associated hardware to enable remote work.

“We weren’t the only ones trying to get computers,” said Chief Information Officer Robert Benavidez. With a county staff of roughly 1,700 employees who could work from home (out of 2,248 employees), Benavidez and his team scrambled to make the purchases.

“Chips were in short supply. We bought computers at Costco and Sam’s Club. We needed memberships, so we’re asking, ‘Who has a membership?’”

Benavidez cites as his team’s biggest accomplishment the ability to enable the majority of county employees to work remotely with good equipment. CARES funding in the amount of $3.27 million made it possible for employees to receive laptops, keyboards, monitors and the associated endpoint security systems. Purchasing the equipment was just half the problem.

The other half of the problem was supporting the remote workforce.

“The biggest challenge we faced was the county’s lack of experience with employees doing remote work on a mass scale,” Benavidez said. “That manifested itself with connectivity issues on home networks, outages with CenturyLink, education and health training challenges, and printing.”

To manage the support issues, Benavidez said the team used contracts and CARES funding to bring in additional help at the service and desktop level.

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Enabling the bulk of county employees to work remotely. This encompassed hardware, procurement, deployment, Ring Central licensing, digital signatures, and Windows Teams to provide for over 600 virtual meetings a week.

2. Partnering with essential organizations, departments, and operations staff to implement pandemic-related missions:
   - Vaccination and testing sites, which needed computers and Wi-Fi.
• Housing and its need to distribute grants to landlords and tenants.
• Economic Development and its need to deliver small business grants, including the introduction of digital signature capability.
• Wireless networks at eight county community centers, Youth Services Center, and Metropolitan Detention Center so students could continue to learn remotely.
• Enabling Ring Central for critical departments that handled hundreds of phone calls a day, such as the citizen Contact Center and the Assessor’s and Treasurer’s offices.

3. Assisting the remote workforce while continuing to execute key programs and projects:

• Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square. “We came in starting in January 2020” to wire the building, Benavidez said.
• Geomanagement system.
• Behavioral Health’s case management system.

Biggest Challenges

1. Remote technology assistance to remote workforce.

2. Ordering and supply chain.

A Shoutout to the Information Technology Department

By Tina Tomlin-Bronson

Amidst the chaos and emotions of the onset effects of COVID-19 to Bernalillo County, the Contact Center teammates were directed to telework. That immediately ignited an internal panic for the leadership on how to make that work: “How can we continue to receive calls from both internal and external customers, ensure that business continues, and keep our agents safe?”

The Contact Center sprang into action and did the best we could with the technology that we grew accustomed to. Calls were being received, routed and addressed, but we lost something crucial – the back-end support. We no longer had access to data such as the type of call or call volumes; additionally, we had agents answering calls on cell phones and we could not equitably distribute the workload.

Then, IT dialed us into a proof of concept effort with RingCentral. RingCentral is a cloud-based communications system for voice, fax, text, online meetings, conferencing, and collaboration. With this technology, we found that we could easily connect our remote employees under one phone system, regardless of their location. This is a true game changer.

The calls into the Contact Center are equally distributed to all the teammates; we have access to data and we are even more connected through the messaging feature. We are close while...
being apart. We are so relieved and grateful for the technology to be able to fulfill our mission of providing stellar customer service.

The efforts of the IT team are invaluable and so appreciated. They are now moving towards getting the following groups active on the RingCentral platform to further the proof of concept: The Treasurer’s Office, the Assessor’s Office and the Solid Waste Program at Public Works.

Here are a few pics of the amazing Contact Center specialists answering calls for Bernalillo County. The Contact Center has the capacity to help you take calls. We can be talking FAQs on your behalf; we can enter data into forms on behalf of your customers for submission; submit work orders; and we can serve as an alternate answering site if all your staff is busy. You need someone to answer calls during a certain outreach effort? We can help! Someone once said to me, “Aren’t you just receptionists?” The answer is no – we’re more than you think.

Source: BernCo Connect, April 28, 2020
FINANCE DIVISION: LESSONS LEARNED

Training:

• Continuous training on essential documentation and forms used in an emergency.

• Scenario planning and strategic preparedness. What are trends/risks/opportunities we see and how do we better position ourselves?

Essential Functions/Workers:

• Identification of internal orders and who is responsible for funneling all this information. It might not be a deputy county manager.

• Clarify Emergency Operations Center daily meeting attendees. Who are they? What departments should be involved? Should all department directors be in EOC daily briefings?

Protocols/Policies:

• Logistical finessing of inventory and purchasing.

• Update all policies to reflect what was done in an emergency versus normal operation.

• Update policies to reflect the inclusion of procedures that created time and staff efficiencies.

• Remote work option as a permanent capability.

• Emergency instructions developed during pandemic finessed and set aside so they are ready to go in another emergency.

Communication:

• Daily staff calls, especially in a remote environment, are vital.

• Communication among EOC, logistics, and finance needs to be enhanced.

• Clear assignments for team members and updates from each during each call.

Staffing:

• Preparedness in advance to bring in contract labor to train on basic functions so regular staff is not stretched too thin.

Technology:

• Payroll system that brings all departments under one timekeeping system.

• Pay codes set up so things flow systematically.
As the COVID-19 pandemic stretched from weeks to months, public works crews across departments felt the sting. Between August and December of 2020, three out of five county construction crews were in quarantine. The crews that remained had two to three employees when a crew typically has eight to 10 people.

Despite this staffing crunch, the county’s capital construction projects moved forward and stayed on schedule. This is one of the key highlights of the Public Works Division, and Deputy County Manager Elias Archuleta gives great credit to the dedicated work force that made it happen despite the challenges.

“We were so busy,” Archuleta said. “There was a lot of exposure and risk to the crews. Sometimes we lost entire crews due to contact tracing. … So we figured out one- to two-man crews on alternative schedules so that we could spread out. We couldn’t be as efficient but we needed to separate the crews to minimize exposure.”

Archuleta and department directors are proud of their successes in keeping $44 million in construction projects moving forward. Those projects - and the affiliated work that goes into those projects, such as permitting and inspections – kept the economy moving forward.

Across the nation, that was not necessarily the case. Among the most common cuts that occurred during the pandemic were the postponement of capital improvement projects, cited by more than 30% of respondents in a survey conducted by the International City/County Management Association.7

Top Accomplishments

1. Technical Services staff kept construction projects, inspections, and permitting on track despite an increase in volume.

2. Fleet and Facilities Management crews continued their maintenance of the county’s nearly 1,400 vehicles and delivered daily custodial services to more than 700,000 square
feet of building space at 123 functional locations, even in the face of an unknown virus and how it was transmitted.

3. Operations and Maintenance staff maintained street repairs and cleaning, storm drainage services, trash service, graffiti removal and the transit station with minimal to no interruption to service.

4. Natural Resource Services employees also saw an increase in demand for well, wastewater, and water conservation services and exceeded program goals despite the challenges of going virtual.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Increased cost of construction by nearly 30%.

2. Managing field and shop crews in a social distancing environment.

3. Losing staff – and sometimes entire crews – to exposures and contact tracing.

4. Remote work, and the meetings that got scheduled back to back without any breaks.

   “There was a tendency to schedule meetings one after the other,” Archuleta said. “There was no break. The virtual calendar showed an opening, and it would be taken. So there was a tendency for me to go and switch from call to call. It was pretty exhausting.”

*The COVID-19 pandemic did not shut down the weather. Public Works crews still maintained roads, albeit with smaller crews.*
Most of us look forward to Fridays and routinely tout, TGIF! However, during the long months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fridays were not good days in the Technical Services Department.

Director Brian Lopez said: “Fridays were awful between August of 2020 and February of 2021. That’s when the tests came back.”

Lopez is referring to COVID-19 tests that employees had to take if they suspected they had been exposed to the virus, which happened often. Bernalillo County crews worked with general contractor crews. Among the crews, suspected contacts with COVID-19 happened frequently.

Lopez said between August and December of 2020, three crews out of five crews were out on quarantine.

“When contractors were sending their crews home because of a positive test, then we had to send our guys home because our guys were in close contact with them,” he said. “It left us stuck. We had numerous construction projects ongoing and it was hard to meet the staffing requirements.”

On top of the impact of the coronavirus on staffing levels, Lopez also said the construction industry was booming and there were staff losses due to retirements, excessive workloads, and other opportunities in the construction sector that offered higher salaries.
Development Review

The increase in the number of construction projects also increased the level of work for the Development Review team. The increase, coupled with COVID-19 protocols and social distancing requirements, did not hamper the work of the permit review and inspection teams.

The permit processing time did not decrease, nor did it take longer to review a permit, said Kevin Grovet, Development Review program manager. “Our inspectors worked out of the office, and their inspection services remained on time and at a high level,” he said. “Our safety measures were so good, that no one on the DR team got COVID-19 and everyone was able to work through the pandemic.”

Grovet also learned something invaluable during the challenges of the pandemic: “People will step up to meet expectations,” he said. “People are responsible and people take their job seriously. … It was comforting to me. I knew I could depend on my staff, but (the pandemic) enforced my belief that I have good people in my department.”
Top Accomplishments

1. The completion of $44 million in construction projects, including Bridge Boulevard Phase 1.

2. Records management completion prior to the move to Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square (BC@AS). “We were teleworking,” Lopez said. “And we had the move and all the departments had to reorganize, clean up, and do file management. We were able to get all the activity completed.”

3. The high level of customer service was maintained.

4. Permit processing stayed on target with no delays.

5. Inspections were delivered within deadlines and at high level.

6. No illnesses were related to COVID-19.

Biggest Challenges

1. COVID-19 quarantines of construction staff.

2. Staff losses to retirement and other outside opportunities that offered higher salaries.

3. Getting all staff set up to work remotely. “We weren’t set up for teleworking,” Lopez said. “Not everyone had a county cell phone. … We weren’t set up fully with laptops. So early on, there were a lot of challenges.”

4. The work increased, but the staffing levels dropped in Development Review.

5. Becoming adept at using technology to do work that used to be done in person, such as doing high-quality inspections without meeting with engineers.

6. Relocation to Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square.
NATURAL RESOURCE SERVICES

Like so many department managers across the county, Natural Resource Services Director Dan McGregor is quick to praise his team for being creative and continuing to work in stressful conditions created by an unknown virus.

“I have a great staff committed to what they’re doing,” McGregor said. “They’ve been doing it for 18 solid months. That level of intensity peters out because we’re human. In my opinion, an 80% stress level keeps you engaged and sharp. My folks have been operating at a 100-110% stress level and we’re really trying to ratchet things back.”

Highlights of his team’s efforts include water conservation programs that went virtual and permits and enforcements that also had to be done electronically. While he is aware of his team’s accomplishments, he is also keen to know what he could have done better. He asked managers Megan Marsee and Glenn DeGuzman: “What worked and what didn’t for you two toward me?”

Their answers, which created quite a chuckle: “The email communication was great,” DeGuzman said. “The length of them were pretty extreme.” All joking aside, Marsee and DeGuzman praised McGregor for doing most of the “heavy lifting with a new ordinance, communication channels, and the response to COVID-19” in the Natural Resources Services Department.

WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly doused the efforts of the small Water Conservation Program team. That’s because their work entails water conservation consultations at one of 17,000 properties served by private wells and small water systems in unincorporated Bernalillo County.

The Rainwater Harvesting program gets especially busy in March – just as the pandemic forced everyone to shelter at home.

“From mid-March to mid-June, the program was down,” Water Conservation and Resource manager Megan Marsee said. “When we opened the programs back up, we had an incredible demand for rain barrels. People were at home. They were focused on home improvements and landscaping projects. We saw a huge increase in interest.”

Program staff had to figure out when they reopened how to deliver rain barrels, and how to do so in compliance with COVID-19 protocols, Marsee said.
The spike in activity in July - and the team’s response to it - led to the Water Conservation Program being recognized in November of 2020 by the Board of County Commissioners.

The proclamation cited the team’s efforts in the first quarter of fiscal year 2021, in which the staff delivered 132 rain barrels to residences -- greater than all deliveries in fiscal years 2019 and 2020. This effort is one of the team’s top accomplishments, Marsee said.

Another challenge that became an accomplishment was the improved efficiency of water conservation education and outreach programs. In order for customers to qualify for water conservation incentives, for example, a water efficiency consultation at homes or businesses is required.

In-home consultations had to stop during the stay-at-home orders, but outdoor consultations could continue. Marsee said the Water Conservation Program team revised the consultation to allow customers to collect information for the indoor portion of the consultation.

“The outdoor portion of the consultation was conducted by Bernalillo County staff, following safe COVID-19 practices of masking and social distancing,” Marsee said. “We found that having customers collect data for us helps them engage a little more and shortened the consultation. It made the whole thing more efficient, so it was a net positive.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Minimizing the shutdown period for the water conservation incentive programs from mid-March 2020 to mid-June 2020.

2. Meeting increased customer demand for rain barrels.

3. Implementation of multiple new initiatives in the fiscal year 2021-2025 Water Conservation Plan

Water Conservation By the Numbers

211 properties with private wells and small water systems received water conservation incentives, exceeding the target goal of 200.

394 water conservation incentives delivered, including 367 rain barrels.

215,800 gallons of water saved between April-June 2021, according to the new WaterWays customer relationship management system.

Eight water conservation workshops that were planned in 2020 had to be canceled. So instead, a partnership with other agencies created a 13-part series of short training videos.

GovDelivery water conservation program email subscriptions reached 1,200 subscribers.

893 building permits reviewed for water conservation requirements, showing an upward trend in construction permitting.

Source: FY21 Annual Report, Water Conservation and Resources
Update, including the launch of three new water conservation incentive programs; a new, more detailed water efficiency consultation; and a new customer relationship management system.

4. Partnership with the county’s Open Space program and Stormwater Quality program, Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Arid LID Coalition to transition eight in-person water conservation workshops to a 13-part video training series.

Biggest Challenges

1. Pivoting from an in-person work environment to teleworking without advanced notice.

2. Launching new water conservation programs in an environment fraught with uncertainty and instability.

3. Training two new staff members in the Natural Resource Services section remotely, who started in February and March 2020, respectively.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TECHNICAL SERVICES REVIEW

COVID-19 forced many departments to move into the 21st century and implement new standard operating procedures for processing payments and permits. The pandemic also forced contractors to do the same.

“We were chasing down contractors to turn in inspection forms electronically – take a picture of the form and email it,” said Glenn DeGuzman, manager of Technical Review Services. “The documents were not visible. We encouraged them to upgrade their phones and welcomed them to the 21st century. We had to go out and help them learn how to use their new phones.”

In addition to permitting processes, Technical Review Services had to move payments to some electronic format.

“We customers would submit wastewater permits electronically,” said Glenn DeGuzman, manager of Environmental Health Technical Review Services. “We called for payment by phone. It was a long ordeal because people normally came in or sent in their payments with the wastewater applications.”

Despite the extra steps in getting payments, DeGuzman touts as one of his team’s top accomplishments the ability to

<table>
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<th>Wells and Wastewater</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wastewater. Total # of permits inspected and permitted: <strong>462</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wells. Total number of permits inspected and permitted: <strong>243</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total # permits processed in FY2021 (wastewater, wells, evaluations): <strong>1,764</strong></td>
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process and issue more than 1,000 permits for wastewater systems and wells. “The construction industry kept us booming,” DeGuzman said.

Top Accomplishments

1. A new wastewater ordinance was adopted. The ordinance (No. 2021-6) includes new fees and rules to supplement water conservation and flood plain management efforts.

2. New standard operating procedures that helped keep the office on track with permits and payments.

Biggest Challenges

1. Paper permits transitioning to online formats.

2. Preparing for the move to Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square.

3. Enforcements increased because more residents were calling to complain about surfacing sewage. “We would get neighbor complaints between each other and go out and mediate,” DeGuzman said. “People were at home and looking at everyone else’s property.”

4. The political and social climate outside the workplace added more work for the team. “We had increased vehicle and building security; protests, rallies, and elections,” DeGuzman said. “We had two county vehicles broken into and one set on fire during a protest.”

Enforcements increased for Technical Review Services staff because more residents were filing environmental complaints. Photo source: GovDelivery newsletter, Oct. 21, 2021.
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT

While residents were forced to shelter in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, county operations and maintenance employees saw their task orders increase by 25%, said Director Antonio Jaramillo.

“People were at home,” he said. “They saw everything. They called in everything. We have a 24-hour response time so the calls were coming in: illegal dumping, cracks in the road, overgrown weeds. Constituents were more vocal in what they wanted done and demanded it to be done right away.”

One of the team’s biggest challenges was coming up with creative solutions to address task orders without violating the COVID-19 mitigation protocols, Jaramillo said.

To minimize exposure to crew members, supervisors called each employee the night before to give them their assignments. This allowed employees to show up to work and go straight from their personal vehicle to their work vehicle without any risk of exposure.

“We changed the order of operations,” Jaramillo said. “We were able to minimize exposure to each crew by limiting the amount of interaction between groups.”

Limited staffing also added to the challenges of supporting more than 1,160 square miles of road, storm drain, traffic, and solid waste infrastructure and services in the unincorporated areas of the county.

One of the lessons learned from the pandemic was that there are some customer service operations that cannot by limited - even during a pandemic, Jaramillo said. The East Mountain Transfer Station reduced its hours at the start of the pandemic to comply with state and county orders to reduce staffing to increase social distancing, he said.
“That blew up in our faces,” Jaramillo said. “People were at home, cleaning their yards and garages. When we would open back up, we had lines on the highway backed up. We were inundated. Even our employees wanted to go back to work. After three months, we went back to normal.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Continued operations with minimal to no interruption to service. Crews completed task orders within the department’s 24-hour commitment timeline despite being short staffed and despite the county-mandated restrictions.

2. Minimized exposure to each crew by limiting the amount of interaction between groups.

3. Assisted other departments in COVID-19-related tasks. For example, staff accountant Amber Romero worked with the EOC-Finance and Administration section to help with the reconciliation and auditing process. In addition, Operations and Maintenance staff provided traffic control up to three times a week at various vaccination sites and helped with the clinics and the voter sanitization process during the primary and general elections of 2020.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Staffing. Keeping up with task orders and large projects with a reduced number of staff; making sure everyone had what they needed to remotely work; figuring out who was exposed and the time frame and new staffing formulas needed to keep projects on track.

2. Constant Changes. Keeping up with the evolving information about the COVID-19 virus and the various restrictions that were in place at any given time.

3. Morale. Operations and Maintenance staff kept working onsite when many other county staff worked from home. In addition, assuring staff who came to work that we were doing everything possible to keep them safe.

4. Microsoft Teams is not available to operational staff, so it was difficult communicating or having meetings with field crews.

5. Contacting some county employees. “Ring Central had not been deployed to everyone yet, and it was difficult reaching someone because the only number you had was their desk phone,” Jaramillo said.
While a sizable chunk of county employees felt safer working from home, Fleet & Facilities Management employees went to work cleaning a virus they did not know much about. What kind of enemy were they dealing with?

A Brookings Institute article published in May of 2020 called workers like the county’s building maintenance employees the “essential but undervalued” workers on the COVID-19 front lines. These workers were declared essential, and so they went into environments to do their normal cleaning in abnormal circumstances.

“At the beginning, (staff) were all riled up,” said Matt Zamora, Building Management and Maintenance Program manager. “No one knew about the virus. What is this virus? How long does it stay on a surface?”

Those surfaces spanned across 123 functional locations in 102 county buildings, with some as small as 320 square feet to One Civic Plaza at nearly 300,000 square feet. Zamora said that cleaning these locations was “bar none, the most intense and sought after accomplishment our staff completed” during the pandemic.

Zamora said that contract cleaning crews do regular cleaning at buildings. But when there was an exposure, county maintenance staff would disinfect the building.

Another challenge was the sheer number of county locations and a delay of information. “We would show up to do work orders, and no one is there,” Zamora said. “Information was delayed getting back to us that between the time the work order was put in and the time we sent a crew, they had a positive case and everyone is quarantining, the building is closed.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Cleaning all the county-owned buildings despite COVID-19 restrictions and lack of specific information about the need to clean because of a positive case.

2. Keeping all county-owned vehicles maintained for service, especially those of emergency personnel, whose work did not stop during the pandemic.

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Biggest Challenges

1. Communication flows with departments.
   a. Some facilities have more needs than others, and the relationships with staff at those facilities allowed for an easier and timely flow of information.
   b. At facilities where there was not a relationship, Zamora said, it was rare to hear from them if they needed services.
   c. Vague references to positive cases in an area of a building. “There would be an alert, ‘There’s a positive case at Building B in Public Works in the supervisor area,’” Zamora said. “Which specific area? Custodians would go in and bomb the area. Our staff would also hear about positive cases through the grapevine. That was extremely frustrating.”

2. Staff did not tell supervisors they had been exposed to someone with COVID-19, especially after the 80 hours of COVID-19 leave expired.

   “There seemed to be a delay with information on coming into contact with a positive case after the 80 hours of COVID time was used by employees,” Zamora said. “When that expired, there was some withholding of information. You wouldn’t disclose until you got a positive test result. By then, you’re at work for a few days.”

Disinfection by the Numbers

CARES funding purchased cleaning, disinfection, and sanitation supplies.

Fleet and Facilities: $777,929

YSC Sanitation: $4,713

MDC Sanitation: $168,690

Total: $951,332
PUBLIC WORKS DIVISION: LESSONS LEARNED

Training:

- Field personnel need to be consistently trained on how to handle different situations in emergencies. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) training and field exercises will assist with this continuous training.
- Training for supervisors: How do they deal with employees who refuse to follow safety protocols based on an emergency? What are acceptable actions to take?
- Training for how to fill out leave requests. Different pay codes were confusing at the beginning of COVID-19. It was difficult acquiring all the information over the phone to get them filled out correctly.
- Training on FEMA forms and how to fill them out.

Essential Functions/Workers:

- Increase staffing, especially in emergency situation.
- Adequate personal protective equipment should always be on hand, especially for those departments and employees who are more likely to have the most exposure.
- Customer service and safety of employees is a balancing act. Not every department can afford to have reduced hours/staffing because demand for services does not go away.

Protocols/Policies:

- Update procedures for paperless business, including solid waste payments and electronic signatures.
- Recognize trends and patterns in the industry and plan for them.
- What are protocols that can be followed for employees who refuse to abide by safety requirements, such as wearing a mask?
- Quarantining staff was difficult to keep up with in terms of who is out, how long they are out, etc. Risk Management and the Emergency Operations Center need better coordination to assist departments in sorting through these situations.
- Increase outreach to underserved areas.

Communication:

- Windows Teams improved communications and made it more efficient.
- Improve flow of communication between Emergency Operations Center/Risk Management and Fleet & Facilities staff for quick awareness of new positive cases, which buildings are closed, and which buildings have exposures.
- Outlook contact information was not useful, and Ring Central had not been fully deployed to everyone. It was hard to reach people by telephone as their numbers were their desk numbers.
• Operational staff do not have Teams and laptops, so communication and meetings with them were difficult.
• Developing a new way to ensure better communications with Fleet & Facilities.

Staffing:
• Continuation of teleworking option. It provides a benefit to employees and is a powerful recruitment tool in departments that are finding it difficult to fill positions.
• Staffing is an underlying issue, so any use of paperless technologies to do the work needs to be balanced with quality control.
• Loss of staff due to retirements, other opportunities for higher paying jobs, and excessive workloads.
• Increasing facilities’ staffing during emergencies for dedicated team calling. Big facilities are covered, but the smaller buildings are not.

Technology:
• Continuation of online committee hearings for faster approvals.
• E-signatures will continue as an efficiency tool.
• Staff need cell phones. The use of home and personal cell phones when the shift to remote work occurred was troublesome to many.
• Public meetings via Zoom do not always work. Not every constituent is adept at using the technology.
• Online formats for workshops and trainings for constituents are nice for those who know how to use the technology. There is still a group of constituents the county lost touch with because they do not have access to virtual platforms.

Operations & Maintenance staff continued their work in the field throughout the pandemic.
The COVID-19 pandemic created a lot of fear and uncertainty among many segments of the Bernalillo County community. It was the roughly 600 employees in the Community Services Division who eased that pain and provided a vast safety net that provided comfort to many.

“We gave a way a lot of food to kids and seniors and everyone in between,” said Enrico Gradi, deputy county manager. “We provided housing vouchers and rental assistance, and all community center programming went virtual. We communicated to the public what we were doing, and our Parks and Recreation team was the backbone to the vaccination efforts.

“We were able to keep Bernalillo County staff working and kept local businesses, construction, and restaurants working by doing permitting online, in-person, fax – whatever it took,” Gradi said.

As Gradi reflected on the division’s impact on the community, he had three words to describe the challenges the departments faced and employees overcame as they grappled with how best to deliver needed services: Adaptation, Innovation, and Resourcefulness.

“COVID put us closer to where we should be in customer service,” he said. “It gave us a platform for future service, so we don’t want to fall back into our former prescribed silos. We had to evolve and adapt, and we did. We have to keep it going.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Working across departments and within the community to provide essential services, such as food and housing.

2. Providing well-planned and coordinated vaccination clinics and testing sites.

3. Supporting the building and food industries with permitting and inspections.

4. Community engagement programs that encouraged vaccinations and allowed people to watch a movie somewhere other than their home.

5. Communication with employees via BernCo Connect.

6. Online community programming for children and adults.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Overcoming technology fears to use Teams, RingCentral, and Zoom with confidence.
3. Distribution of federal CARES funding in a brief time frame.
4. Keeping employees safe while they provided direct assistance to the public.
5. Maintaining personal relationships with staff and community partners.

The Community Services Division offered many programs to try to offset the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Rain or shine. Snow or icy. Windy or balmy. No matter the weather, the Housing Department staff went outdoors to ensure a continuity of housing services to its target population of low income, elderly, and disabled residents – most of whom do not have electronic means of communication like cell phones.

“It’s hard for them to stay in touch with us and their case managers,” said Housing Director Betty Valdez. “If they are connected, they need to find a place with WIFI. We have a lot of homeless clients. So we ended up having to meet them in open area spaces.”

Housing employees went where they could follow social distancing guidelines, Valdez said. They used community center parking lots. They coordinated drive-by application and documentation drop-off centers. They placed drop boxes at community centers in the parking lots. Then the weather would change, so they laid tarps over the drop boxes. They used chain link to attach drop boxes to poles in the parking lots. Whatever worked.

“We became creative,” Valdez said.

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Continuing to meet federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) goals of maintaining 97% voucher funding. The department receives $20 million each year from HUD, and if it is not used, the department loses it.

2. Distribution of nearly $200,000 in CARES housing support grants in a mere two months to meet the deadline.

3. Continuation of many “boutique” programs, such as the Community Connections Supportive Housing Program that is supported by taxpayer dollars and partners with the Department of Behavioral Health Services.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Maintaining the 97% lease-sub requirement to maintain HUD funding.

2. Maintaining Housing’s designation as a higher performing housing program. “HUD grades us on 14 performance measures,” Valdez said. “We are high performing, and we get that designation by maintaining these HUD performance measures. We don’t want to lose it. It was difficult during the COVID pandemic.”

3. CARES money distribution. “It had huge regulatory requirements,” Valdez said. “We only had a couple of months from application to distribution to landlords. We only spent almost $1 million.”
The seven-member team at ABC Community School Partnership had one great advantage that helped them support thousands of students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic: relationships with community partners.

Those partnerships came together to help students forced to learn at home from March 2020 to Fall of 2021. When schools closed, services that are linked to the schools also had to shut down. ABC used relationships with many community partners to ensure continuity of those services, most notably the Summer Lunch Program.

What is normally a 10-week program that provides lunches to school-age children in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County became a 16-month program that distributed a total of 576,348 meals to children ages 1 to 18 years old.

Workforce availability was the program’s greatest challenge, said Danette Townsend, executive director of ABC Community School Partnership. With the additional work required for COVID safe practices and additional health risks, people that typically work the summer food program chose not to return, Townsend said.

“It caused us to limit sites to 35,” Townsend said. “We typically have 50 to 55 sites. We hired or made job offers to every single applicant we got.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Summer Food Service Program and food security efforts.

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**ABC COMMUNITY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

![Image: ABC Community Schools runs the Summer Food Service Program, which was extended by 54 months during the pandemic.]
2. Community School Development. “We continued technical assistance for community school coordinators virtually,” said Daniel Manzano, ABC’s special projects coordinator. “We created a new ‘cohort’ model to support each coordinator and each school as necessary.”

3. The Big Table was begun as a way for community organizations to remain connected, share resources, and collaborate throughout the lockdown. More than 150 community members and organizations continue to participate in regular virtual meetings.

4. System-level partnerships were expanded to support community schools’ families and students during the school closures:
   - Catholic Charities shifted their Adult Education classes at Los Padillas Elementary from in-person to online.
   - Horizons ABQ created a robust plan to offer virtual summer camp learning and project experiences for students at Navajo Elementary and other schools in the South Valley.
   - Boys and Girls Club and Citizen Church volunteers offered virtual tutoring for students through Highland High School’s The HUB! Online! program. Daily engagement activities were also offered for Highland High students and the incoming ninth grade students from their feeder middle schools (Wilson, Hayes, and Van Buren).
   - ABC partnered with Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), the City of Albuquerque, Any Given Child ABQ, and Katharsis Media to produce 40 virtual arts education videos, which were available to all APS students so they could experience arts education through distance learning.

5. Eleven ABC coordinators volunteered their time during the month of June to assist the Albuquerque Housing Authority with Section 8 housing voucher pre-applications to enter the lottery system. A total of 43 families were assisted.

6. ABC partnered with the Census Bureau, Bernalillo County, the City of Albuquerque, and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) to increase U.S. Census response rates by targeting 600 individuals who received face masks with census messaging and 30 individuals who each received $100 gift cards as a response incentive.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Maintaining personal relationships across the many partnership sectors with remote technology such as Zoom and Windows Teams.

2. The lack of an administrative bench that was needed to run the lunch program for an additional 13 months while also achieving ABC’s primary objectives.
SENIOR AND SOCIAL SERVICES

What else can a 500-gallon General Mills container be used for if not for Cheerios? During the COVID-19 pandemic, these containers became a critical way to make handwashing easier for the homeless population in the International District.

“East Central Ministries retrofitted (the containers) with valves and filled them up with water,” Senior and Social Services manager George Schroeder said. “These were for the homeless to use as handwashing stations. It was not a sustainable intervention, but it was a good temporary fix based on the importance of hand washing and an effort to reduce the possibility of transmission.”

In addition to handwashing stations, the Office of Senior and Social Services also worked collaboratively with Silver Horizons to help feed the county’s vulnerable senior citizens. One out of every seven seniors in the county lives below the poverty level and the COVID-19 pandemic put these vulnerable adults in an even more precarious situation.

Senior and Social Services played a key role at the start of the pandemic to ensure this population had adequate food. “We organized drive-through pantries for seniors,” Schroeder said. “We provided the space and traffic control. Silver Horizons brought the food, packaged it up, and handed it out to cars.”

In the first few months of the pandemic, the drive-thru food pantries were seeing around 300 cars come through the line. “After that, it tapered off,” Schroeder said. “Other food pantries kicked up their game. So at the beginning, it was a need we were able to fill in a brief window of time.”

[Online genealogy classes offered by Senior and Social Services were a hit, with more than 400 participants.]

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9 https://silverhelpingseniors.org/services/
Top Accomplishments

1. Drive-thru food pantries for seniors.

2. Collaborating with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to buy locally produced fruits and vegetables.

   “Restaurants and farmers markets were closed,” Schroeder said. “So (AFSC) bought it up and distributed to the local food banks. It kept a lot of small farms from going bankrupt. We contributed $40,000 to the effort. It went directly to the local farmers and gave them assurance that they should keep growing.”

3. Collaborating with East Central Ministries with a $7,500 contract to install and maintain the handwashing stations.

4. Online programming for adults and senior citizens, which turned out to be extremely popular, said community program specialist Veronica Cordova. Between the months of January and June 2021, the programs reached nearly 1,000 people. Among the online programs that were offered to seniors were Paint a Portrait, a Comedy Workshop, and Bingo with Brenda on Thursday evenings. Genealogy classes, a multigenerational program, was also offered, and it was very popular, Cordova said.

   “So many people were at home, doing research, and on the computer,” Cordova said. “It’s online and you can do so much with information people were introduced to. We were hitting from 127 to 176 people per class.”

Biggest Challenges

1. Technical challenges in online programming. However, Cordova said the Department of Information Technology was helpful preparing the team for implementation.
YOUTH, ADULT, AND OUTDOOR PROGRAMMING

PARKS AND RECREATION

Eight community centers throughout the county are the hubs of the neighborhoods that surround them. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone to shelter at home, community recreation section manager Andre Dickson asked himself: “What do I do? What do we do?”

Working alongside many different county departments and community partners, the Parks and Recreation staff and community centers became critical in the distribution of food, vaccines, and fun youth and family activities.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) training helped Parks and Recreation staff members learn how to set up community centers as shelters and PODS (point of distribution sites). “We had been trained for 10 years in shelter management and POD coordination,” Dickson said. “We started out with Vida Pharmacy. The staff loved it. They were getting out of their houses and serving their communities.” (See COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Sites)

Another highlight was the virtual seven-week summer recreation program. Thousands of viewers watched the variety of programs and fun activities offered on Facebook and YouTube:

- Virtual tours and visits to the Albuquerque International Sunport; Orona Ranch, La Luz Trail, and Fenton Lake in the Jemez mountains.
- Karate and flamenco dance instruction.
- Arts and crafts and food preparation how-to videos.
- Junior Achievement classes.
- Facebook contests with live prize drawings.

Building off of the summer meal program organized by ABC Community School Partnership, Parks and Rec staff distributed grab-n-go arts and crafts kits – a feature of the virtual summer program.

“We knew food was important,” Dickson said. “Our team came up with the idea of providing arts and crafts on Fridays with their meals.”
A quick look at the Facebook programming between June 8, 2020, and July 9, 2020, shows just how popular the summer program was. 340,000 viewers took advantage of the myriad classes and programming.

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Staffing and coordination of COVID-19 vaccination and testing sites.

2. The distribution of grab-n-go meals, arts and crafts, ceramics, and physical activities as part of the “Virtual Summer Recreation 2020” program on the department’s Facebook page. Classes were unique and wide-ranging.

3. COVID-safe protocols were provided and personal protective equipment supplies were maintained at adequate levels throughout the pandemic.

4. The three-day Virtual Winter Camp in December of 2020.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Keeping employees safe while providing direct assistance to the public.

2. Creating virtual summer and winter programing and putting the content online.

   “We had to figure it out,” Dickson said. “We’re working with staff who haven’t been in front of the camera. So you have to get your staff to relax; you record; you edit it. Videos had to be short and to the point.”

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**Summer Virtual Programs by the Numbers**

- Program kickoff: 768 views
- Virtual tour of Sunport International Airport: 576 views
- Chavez Karate classes: 603 views
- Horsemanship at Orona Ranch: 171 views
- Facebook Live prize drawing: 466 views
- Flamenco dancing: 142 views
- Hiking La Luz Trail: 660 views
- Live weekly recap with Parks and Rec staffers Chamar Garrison and Julian Burton: 434 views
- How to make tie-dye masks and shirts: 1,000 views
- Virtual hike to Fenton Lake: 312 views
- Total views (6/8/20-7/9/20): 339,075

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10 PROS videos: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdFSMXk1OwGQbXKgaU5-atQ/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdFSMXk1OwGQbXKgaU5-atQ/featured)
OPEN SPACE

Bernalillo County’s open spaces were the areas that residents could go with few worries of contracting the mysterious COVID-19 virus during the long months of the pandemic lockdown. It was the outdoor spaces and parks that helped residents feel a little more normal, and so many residents took advantage of them.

Virtual programs brought residents even closer to the outdoor spaces managed by the county. In fact, outdoor recreation and its importance during the pandemic is evident by one of the online videos called, “Open Space Etiquette,” hosted by Open Space coordinator Adam Splitek and resource specialist Dustin Chavez-Davis. That video saw 2,000 views.

Open Space Supervisor Mari Simbana said online programming provided the team with a lot of creative options.

“We used the flexibility of online programming to invite presenters from a wide range of backgrounds, including those from out of state and even international participants, which led to an increase in ‘likes’ and other engagements from social media,” Simbana said.

Top Accomplishments

1. The creation of three outdoor Gutierrez Hubbell House Museum exhibits with the support of CARES Act funding. At least 1,500 community members viewed the exhibits, co-curated by graduate students at the University of New Mexico. The exhibits:
   - Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence
   - Enduring Querencias
   - Enchiladas: A Global Journey to New Mexico

2. Participation in the virtual Camino Real Trade Fair, organized by the Office of Community Engagement and Outreach. Open Space contributed:
• Lectures on New Mexico food history
• Classes featuring recipes to try at home
• Lecture on the life of Josefa Baca, who acquired the land on which the Gutierrez Hubbell House Museum sits.

3. The Grow the Growers program continued at Hubbell Open Space.

4. Weekly delivery of the Backyard Farming Buzz tips for gardeners on Facebook.

5. Bachechi Open Space virtual programming of environmental and outdoor topics as a livestream on Facebook.

6. The Master Naturalist Program continued, with training and volunteer activities at Bachechi Open Space. During 2020, an active 30 volunteers contributed over 500 volunteer service hours.

Biggest Challenges

1. A higher visitor volume caused trail and habitat damage, and increased litter.

2. Keeping up with public notification and signage about the constantly changing public health orders to mitigate COVID-19 rates.

3. Not being able to deliver programming in person affected the efficacy of some programs/activities.

Like other Bernalillo County departments, Open Space employees had to figure out how to connect with the community. Virtual programming was effective, even if it had its challenges.
COMMUNICATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Did you get the shot?

If you did, you are one of the 90% of residents who got at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine and 78% of county residents who got the full vaccine series. If you did, you may have been influenced by the county’s “Get the Shot” media campaign that resulted in 64 million views and a good reason the county has one of the Top 10 vaccination rates in the State of New Mexico.

“It was a comprehensive bilingual outreach campaign,” said Carrie Moritomo, manager of the Office of Community Engagement and Outreach. “We got trusted messengers in the community and asked them to participate and be a testimonial to get the shot.”

Among the messengers who appealed to the community in the campaign, which ran from March through August of 2021, were Danny Chavez, an entertainment producer, business owner, and body double in the movie industry; a pastor from a church on the West Side; a Bernalillo County firefighter; and a United soccer team co-captain (to appeal to the younger population), Moritomo said.

The Community Engagement and Outreach team also coordinated the month-long “COVID-19 Safe Practices for the Holidays” media campaign that ran from

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December to January of 2020. That campaign had nearly 11 million views. The team also continued a wide variety of events to keep the public engaged.

“My mantra is we need to be agile and flexible,” Moritomo said. “We wanted to continue to offer events and activities for the community.”

Top Accomplishments

1. Coordinated the successful “Get the Shot” and “COVID-19 Safe Practices for the Holidays” media campaigns.

2. Transitioned the El Camino Trade Fair into a virtual event on Facebook and YouTube.

   “We had a partnership with the (county’s) GIS team,” Moritomo said. “We all came together and produced a cool virtual event. The map will forever be on our web site and used as a resource.” (See the map, pictured below, https://bit.ly/2YgOpVz)

3. Transitioned “Movies in the Park” to “Movies in the Parking Lot” at Isleta Amphitheater.

The virtual El Camino Trade Fair was enhanced with the assistance of the county’s GIS team, which created a virtual map along the Camino Real trail.

“...That was a gigantic feat to do every weekend,” Moritomo said. “We accommodated 800 people every weekend. People would come early because it was first-come, first-served. People started lining up at 3 p.m. and we opened the gates at 6:30 p.m. We had food trucks. It was quite an endeavor and exciting.”

4. Collaborated with the Kiwanis Club in Santa Fe to do a virtual Zozobra event.

5. The continuation of business as usual, including recruiting and hiring new staff, executing public art calls, and getting artists commissioned. “We did our events,”
Moritomo said. “We did everything in our mission.”

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Maintaining strict COVID-19-safe practices at community events, such as the Movies in the Parking Lot events.

“We had employees responsible for sanitizing restroom handles,” Moritomo said. “It’s not the sexiest job, but we prided ourselves on keeping people safe and providing a free fun event for the community.”

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**Percentage of Residents Fully Vaccinated by County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Alamos</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinley</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Arriba</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taos</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fe</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandoval</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doña Ana</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernalillo</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages by county of residents with vaccination series completed, as of 12/8/21. Source: https://cvvaccine.nmhealth.org/public-dashboard.html

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Departments across the county came together to help each other ensure activities and events were safe. At left, the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office enjoyed the Movies in the Parking Lot on June 29, 2020. In a Facebook post, the office said, “Our deputies enjoyed taking part in the event, making sure everyone was safe and had fun.”
COMMUNICATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

If there was one challenge that was consistent across all Bernalillo County departments, it was the changing guidelines and protocols for protecting against the COVID-19 virus. Sometimes, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, those guidelines and protocols would change multiple times in a day.

If audiences were confused and overwhelmed, imagine the messengers – the staff of the Communications Department – that had to keep up with all of the information and transmit it.

“We are information people,” said Communication Services Director Tia Bland. “The information changes at the state and national level were a challenge. We were able to react to them, but over a period of time it gets exhausting.”

Besides keeping the community and county staff up to speed on COVID-19, the communications team also solidified the use of BernCo Connect as the “go-to place for internal communications,” Bland said.

“When the pandemic hit, the importance of BernCo Connect was amplified,” Bland said. “It became a more valuable resource for employees.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Increased frequency and value of BernCo Connect as a means of sharing information with employees. The BernCo Connect emails were particularly successful, as many employees still do not go into the intranet every day.

2. Increased frequency of BernCo at a Glance external newsletter to weekly versus every other week.

3. Communicating in the office and at home – whenever the need arose or when a crisis situation occurred. “We were on call 24/7,” Bland said. “We always take our laptops home every day. We didn’t have a remote work policy until the pandemic, but we always have our laptops. That’s the nature of the job.”
4. Maintaining a robust social media presence that effectively communicated all the events and activities that each county department was engaged in.

5. Collaboration with the Information Technology Department to launch new digital signage at Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. The changing health guidance regarding COVID-19 that came from the New Mexico Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

   It was a challenge, Bland said, “to be ‘on’ all the time, to ensure we don’t miss any information, and being able to take in as much information as possible and figure out what we needed to share or not.”

   The communications team developed a system by which they did not alter any information received from the state. “We just posted the links,” Bland said. “That way, we didn’t get into trouble posting misinformation. It was the safest road to take.”

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**Facebook Reach 6 Month Periods**

- **217,265**
  - Sept. 2019 - Feb 2020

- **730,447**
  - March - Aug. 2020

**336.2%**

Bernalillo County’s Facebook pages were a vital source of information to residents and employees. The number of active viewers increased by 336% in a mere few months after the stay at home orders were initiated in the state of New Mexico.
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Public service – pandemic or no pandemic – never takes a break. Consider the number of phone calls that Planning and Development Services employees handled despite everyone sheltering at home between March of 2020 and June of 2021: 81,273.

On top of that, 12,960 records were processed by the team in the same time period. Social distancing requirements and other COVID-19 precautions forced the Planning and Development Services Department to develop creative ways to take those calls and process the records.

“We never closed our doors,” said Planning and Development Services Director Lucas Tafoya. “Supporting essential services in the building and food industries was a top accomplishment.”

To keep up with demand, the department used CARES funding to develop and launch an expanded online menu for contractors to schedule inspections and apply for trade permits, Tafoya said.

In addition, “since the beginning of the pandemic, all of our building inspectors continued to go out into the field,” Tafoya said. “They were reporting to work and conducting inspections with their iPads. We had to provide inspections to ensure safety and compliance with code standards.”

As COVID-19 safety adjustments were made to keep up with the construction and food industry demand, the Planning and Development Services staff expanded options for customers, including providing a drop box in the lobby of Union Square, Tafoya said. Customers could drop off their application and packet into the drop box, staff would process the applications, and call the customer for payment processing.

“It wasn’t the most efficient way of doing things, but it’s how we had to adapt to keep the industry on track and prevent construction projects from being completed without ensuring they met minimum standards,” Tafoya said.

Top Accomplishments

1. The continuation of essential services that kept the building and food industries operating.
2. The continuation of food safety inspections.
3. The continuation of vector control services.
4. The ability to continue safe operations without having any COVID-19 illnesses directly related to work exposures.

5. Coordination with the Human Resources and Budget departments on an internal reorganization for customer service staff that resulted in increased staffing levels, increased salaries, and upgraded positions. “We had recognized before COVID that we positions are essential to have a high turnover rate among our customer service staff,” Tafoya said. “These support customers and all department staff.”

**Biggest Challenges**

1. The fear of the unknown at the beginning of the pandemic. “As the public health orders kept changing, we had to keep changing,” Tafoya said.

2. Overcoming technology challenges. “There was a lot of learning with all of that,” Tafoya said. “Ring Central, Teams, Zoom: Each one had its own quirks. That was a big challenge, adapting to technology and the inconsistency that technology provides.”

3. It took several months for the Department of Information Technology to provide everyone laptops – understandable, to be sure. But “some people were limping along until” those laptops arrived, Tafoya said.
COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION: LESSONS LEARNED

Essential Functions/Workers:

1. Strategize and be methodical in assigning tasks to staff.

Protocols/Policies:

1. Updating policies to reflect the online format that offers flexibility, not only for county employees but for many members of the public as well.

Communication:

1. Work across departments to develop other strategies to engage and reach employees, especially when departments across the county need extra assistance, whether in an emergency situation or not.

Staffing:

1. Continuation of remote work policies.

Technology:

1. Expansion of the Accela database to allow for construction permits to be handled online.
Masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, face shields, toilet paper, and disinfectant wipes. These are just a few of the items that became central in efforts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The logistical challenges of acquiring, storing, and distributing these items – along with training employees about COVID-19 and prevention efforts - fell to the General Services Division. The coordination of these efforts is cited as the top accomplishment by Deputy County Manager Lisa Sedillo-White.

“We had millions to spend,” Sedillo-White said. “But without procurement, we could not have spent one dollar.”

In addition, thousands of items of personal protective equipment (PPE) that was purchased had to be stored and distributed to county personnel and outside entities. “PPE was coming in from the state on pallets,” Sedillo-White said. “The Inventory team was critical in distributing the PPE.”

PPE distribution had to be balanced with ensuring that county staff were following COVID-19 safety protocols, taught to county COVID-19 coordinators by a severely under-staffed Risk Management Department staff.

Top Accomplishments

1. The successful procurement of goods and services for departments and constituents.
2. The receipt and distribution of PPE.
3. The implementation of COVID-19 safety practices and training to COVID-19 coordinators throughout the county.
4. The successful implementation of the Business Center to standardize deliveries and mail.

Biggest Challenges

1. The confusion surrounding the roles of Inventory and Procurement in an emergency situation and coordination of the Emergency Operations Center.
2. In the beginning of the pandemic, technology, and the inability of some employees to work from home.
3. Staffing shortages that stretched Risk Department team members very thin.
County residents may remember the empty shelves in the dry goods sections of grocery stores and large food warehouses during many months of the pandemic. No toilet paper. No tissue. No hand sanitizers. Residents’ go-to suppliers were out of stock.

When staff from the Procurement and Business Services Department sought out supplies needed by county employees on the front lines of the pandemic, they were met with the same problem.

“Everybody was going through the same resources with the same vendors,” said purchasing manager Annie Baca. “When we’re reaching out, they’re saying, ‘I have to put you on a list,’ so unlocking new partnerships outside of whom we normally dealt with was critical.”

The search for supplies was also difficult because COVID-19 was an emergency and so the contracts involving CARES funding had to be written very specifically to withstand scrutiny.

“We had to really dot our I’s and cross our T’s to meet the emergency procurement requirements of the federal government and our auditors,” said Director Dinah Esquivel. “We had to allocate two full-time staff to manage the procurements.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Ensuring supplies were secured in a timely and efficient manner. “It came quick and you had to scramble quickly,” Baca said.

2. Building new relationships with other vendors outside of those whom the county normally deals with. “The county is always looking for new vendors and to expand our working relationship with new vendors,” Baca said. “We were able to do that.”

3. Migrating to electronic submission of bids and proposals and increased efficiencies. “We were in the process of doing that, but COVID-19 forced us to do it faster than anticipated,” Esquivel said.
Biggest Challenges

1. In hindsight, Esquivel said, a staff member from Procurement and Business Services should have been a permanent fixture of the Emergency Operations Center logistics team.

“It was impossible for me to sit on the team and still be director,” Esquivel said. “I couldn’t do both, so it was decided we would replace me with Inventory. We will sit on the logistics team in future emergencies. We are so instrumental in this process. The county can’t buy anything without us.”

2. Emergency procurements.

“Everybody was calling everything an emergency, so we had to filter through all of it,” Esquivel said. “We had to decipher, ‘Does this really meet pandemic and emergency situation, or is this something that the department is elaborating on to call it an emergency because the department needs it now?’”

3. Contracts that would meet requirements for emergency procurement.

4. Field purchases and reconciling those credit card purchases with backup documentation and a special exception form. In a normal situation, purchase credit cards are used with approved vendors. Those approvals come after a vendor is registered and approved by the federal System for Award Management (SAM).

Emergency purchases were being made quickly. “You can’t pass up the opportunity placed before you,” Esquivel said. “Some of these places where we are finding supplies aren’t taking purchase orders. They only wanted credit card purchases.”

SAM verification happened after the fact for many field purchases, Esquivel said. Added Baca: “Luckily, we didn’t run into any issues” with a vendor who was not registered in the SAMS system.
CONSTITUENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES DEPARTMENT/ INVENTORY SECTION

If a county employee has visited the new BernCo Store lately, it might be noticed that among the items available are surgical masks, bottles of hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes. That’s because the county still has “outrageous numbers” of these items purchased for the pandemic.

“We have 130,000 surgical masks,” manager Randy Baca said. “We have 6,000 bottles of hand sanitizer. We have 9,230 face shields. … We can’t give them away.”

The Inventory Section keeps stock at four locations: Building F at 2400 South Broadway; the Metropolitan Detention Center, the Fire and Rescue warehouse, and Alvarado Square. Building F is where the majority of inventory is stored for use by most county employees.

Baca and teammates – Director Carl Broach and Inventory Control coordinator John Vialpando - are most proud of their work as the silent but efficient movers of thousands of supplies across county departments and into the community.

“Our area is very good at managing inventory,” Baca said. “There wasn’t a whole lot of planning needed for the receipt, storage, distribution, and documentation of PPE supplies. Our workflow is excellent.”

The team went into full action mode prior to the activation of the Emergency Operation Center on March 17, 2020. They also anticipated a potential shortage of personal protective equipment and other supplies at the MDC warehouse location. “We went into action on March 16, 2020,” Vialpando said. “On that same day, we started purchasing county PPE. We worked with existing vendors to procure as much as we could relative to chemicals, gloves, toilet paper, and other essential items.”

The proactive approach certainly helped. Said Baca: “We were listening to the news and communicating with our vendors. Vendors were telling us, ‘There are people ordering stuff. Do you want to get involved?’”

After these initial purchases, the Inventory Section did not purchase other pandemic-related supplies, Baca said. That job fell to the Emergency Operations Center, which approved purchase requests made on ICS 213 resource request forms. Orders for supplies were placed with the state using the ICS 213 resource request forms. Those items would be delivered to the county warehouse by the National Guard or by EOC personnel, Baca said.

13 As of Oct. 19, 2021
“We distributed those PPE supplies purely at the direction of the EOC,” Baca said. “A major accomplishment is that we have accounted for every order that came in from the state and every order that went out. We know where everything went. If someone were to ask me, ‘Did you give to this certain entity?’ I could tell them how much and when.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. The ability to provide a quick response to the Emergency Operations Center.

2. The ability to maintain and distribute inventory inside and outside the county. Among the many recipients of the personal protective equipment were hospitals, clinics, Sandoval County, Rio Rancho, and retirement homes.

3. The use of two separate inventories to account for every order that came into the warehouse. Baca said one inventory was for personal protective equipment items provided by the State of New Mexico, and the other was for items purchased by county departments.

4. The establishment of good will between the county and outside entities. “They were so thankful early on,” Baca said. “They wanted to give us money and other things. We would say, ‘No, no,’ but they were so thankful for our presence and our ability to provide them with what they needed.”

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Communication with Emergency Operations Center was not as efficient as it could have been, resulting in a lot of inventory that would come to the warehouse and a lot of frustration among the Inventory staff.

That surplus inventory needed a place to be stored. Many of it still sits in warehouses around the county.

“The EOC was ordering and we didn’t know,” Vialpando said. “Vendors are showing up. … (The EOC) didn’t ask us and utilize us as an independent and separate function to effectively manage the whole COVID response for the county. … They were bringing stuff over whether we wanted it or not. We wouldn’t reject deliveries. We took them. And they’re still here.”

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**Inventory by the Dozens**

- 130,000 surgical masks
- 9,230 face shields
- 8,350 surgical gowns
- 6,000 bottles of hand sanitizer
- 71,000 gloves, size Large

*(as of Oct. 19, 2021)*
Risk Management employees are in the business of providing loss control and prevention programs that ensure employee safety and save thousands of taxpayer dollars.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, risks associated with the virus were not defined. In fact, as late as the fall of 2021, there was still confusion as to why case levels were rising despite an increase in the number of vaccinated residents.

Faced with changing information and the need to attempt to reduce employee risks, Risk Management staff did the best they could to develop training, share that training across departments, and update the training as needed. It was not an easy task, said Director Gina Ortega.

In an attempt to offset the burden on Risk Management safety specialists, the department trained department COVID coordinators to lead the implementation of strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19. They were asked to:

- Monitor social distancing in their workplace.
- Remind employees to wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Verify proper signage was posted.
- Order PPE supplies as needed.
- Communicate with Risk Management and the Emergency Operations Center any concerns or issues that were raised among employees in their respective departments.

The training helped coordinators learn how to fill out the Department-Level Return to Work Checklist, which had to reflect a department’s ability to satisfactorily meet safety conditions before the department could open at Phase II – or 50% - capacity level.

“What was difficult was there were some employees who didn’t feel comfortable doing this,” Director Gina Ortega said. “They would tell us, ‘I don’t want to have to tell them what to do or not to do.’”

Risk Management team members also developed, with the help of the Information Technology Department, an online exposure form that department directors would use to report employee exposures to the virus.
Top Accomplishments

1. Establishment of COVID-19 checklists and policies for departments to follow to lower the risks of exposure to the coronavirus.

2. Continuation of ongoing safety trainings, such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Slip and Fall, and Driver Awareness classes.

3. Establishment of a process to track confirmed cases for reporting to the state Department of Health.

Biggest Challenges

1. Lack of a streamlined process for tracking confirmed cases and exposures. In the beginning, the reports of exposures and confirmed cases among employees were reported to a different county department.

   “Departments felt like we were not addressing their concerns with exposures and confirmed cases,” Ortega said. “We didn’t get all the reports and so it took some time to tweak the process and start receiving all the communications.”

2. Lack of teamwork with Risk Department employees and no follow-up for employees who did not want to adhere to county COVID-19 policies. “It was frustrating,” Ortega said. “It felt like we were spinning our wheels.”

A training video developed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was required of Bernalillo County employees before they returned to the workplace.
### LESSONS LEARNED: GENERAL SERVICES DIVISION

**Training:**

- Streamlined and consistent training on the procedure for reporting COVID-19 exposure and/or positive tests.
- Develop a defined point of contact for exposures and positive tests from the very beginning.

**Essential Functions/Workers:**

- Develop a more seamless way to bring Office of Emergency Management and General Services together in an emergency. There was a breakdown.
- Risk Management should be an essential function in a state of emergency.
- Procurement and Business Services must be part of the logistics team at the front end of acquisition discussions versus just on the EOC-Finance/Administration team when purchases were already made.

**Protocols/Policies:**

- Logistical finessing of inventory and purchasing.
- Remote work as a privilege.
- The addition of personal protective equipment in list of supplies available via BernCo Store.
- Establish a confirmed case process for reporting to state and federal authorities.
- Develop follow-up protocols for employees who refuse to adhere to COVID-19 or other emergency policies.
- Anti-donation clause and its impact on the vast amount of emergency inventory that will expire in 2022. Develop a process for distribution to outside entities that need the items.
- Review emergency process in the area of credit card purchases.
- The ability to receive bids and proposals electronically is one of the biggest improvements made and will continue.

**Communication:**

- Daily briefings, especially in a remote environment, are vital.
• Communication among EOC, logistics, and procurement needs to be enhanced. There were breakdowns between emergency management and inventory, procurement, and risk management staff.
• Develop a system so departments feel they are informed about exposures and confirmed cases, akin to how Albuquerque Public Schools informs parents of exposures and confirmed cases at schools.
• Develop a comprehensive workflow so all departments can communicate on the same page. Too many meetings and too many Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square committees. Sometimes the right hand was not talking to the left hand in the return to work initiatives.
• Develop a streamlined process for employees to report exposures and positive tests. BernCo Connect had the link but many employees did not know it existed.
• Prior to purchase or acquisition of PPE, questions need to be asked: “Is there a need?” “Is there storage space?” “What are the expiration dates for the items?”

**Staffing:**

• Increase number of safety specialists (in process).
• Dedicate a procurement team to EOC logistics and finance and distribute normal work to other staff members.
• Increase temporary or other employees to assist with added inventory and distribution responsibilities.
• Identification of employees who cannot work from home for technology-related reasons. Another way to identify other tasks within and outside the department to utilize these employees.
• Inventory Warehouse were understaffed, and emergency procurement, storage, and distribution of PPE was another task that overwhelmed staff.

**Technology:**

• Some employees do not have Wi-Fi or technology at home, making it a challenge to telework.
• Delays in getting all employees laptops until October kept morale at a low point.
• COVID-19 smartsheet application on the Insider. Many employees were not using this because they did not know it existed. (See communication gaps.)
When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, do you remember the confusion? The rush for grocery items? Empty shelves? Businesses being closed? What did it mean for you as an individual? For business owners, the pandemic brought fear, loss, and an uncertain future.

The emotional component of assisting businesses during the pandemic was staggering, and well outside of the Economic Development team’s wheelhouse. Like so many county departments, the staff forged ahead and was determined to be of help.

“People were losing loved ones, employees, and friends,” Assistant Director Marcos Gonzales said. “People were on the brink of losing businesses that had taken years to develop. People felt helpless. We felt helpless. Money cannot solve or remedy all the ramifications of the pandemic. It was gut-wrenching.”

The federal government was moving quickly to push out information to help businesses, but there was limited direction from the Treasury as to what the Economic Development team could do or could not do.

Collaboration with Deputy County Manager of Finance Shirley Ragin and the National Association of Counties helped the Economic Development team stay well-informed, said Director Mayling Armijo.

“Shirley (Ragin) helped us by keeping current with the (Treasury) rules and was constantly scouring those rules so that we were always well informed,” Armijo said. “Other help came from the Association of Counties and our peers at other counties. There was collaboration among us. … It worked.”

The Small Business Administration was also developing and offering programs that had limited promotion, Gonzales said, and so the team compiled an extensive list of what businesses wanted and/or needed and attached live links to that list so that the businesses could land on the appropriate sites. The team sent out email message blasts to county businesses about how to access SBA programs, too.

“It was apparent that in their efforts to quickly help businesses, (the feds) didn’t have the time to distill the information and put it into one place where businesses could evaluate their eligibility for the assistance and/or apply for it,” Gonzales said. “We decided that our website
needed to be that one place, that one source.”

Gonzales recalled how the county’s website and the information the team was distributing was creating a buzz.

“My phone was blowing up,” he said. “Then our messaging got out: *If you need help, call the county*. It happened organically, just by one person pushing it out on social media. Its reach was amazing, and we were glad to be able to be that resource for our businesses.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Establishment and implementation of the Bernalillo County Small Business Grant Program, in which all funds were expended.

2. The establishment of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program for individuals whose employment was affected by the pandemic lockdown. The program began at the end of 2020 and is ongoing.

3. Connecting with other Economic Development departments nationwide to help residents and businesses.

4. The Edge newsletter was published five times during 2020, and it always offered economic development news for businesses that were suffering.

**Biggest Challenges**
1. The need to quickly prioritize, assign, and reassign responsibilities so that the team could fulfill its commitment to residents and businesses in order to enhance their quality of life during a pandemic.

2. Herding programs nationally is a challenge any time, let alone during a lockdown. There were many moving parts and many details.

3. The emotional component of helping businesses was a surprise to the team.
   “We were overwhelmed by the pain and sadness that our business grant applicants shared with us during the pandemic, and even now,” Gonzales said. “The grant was presented in person to the business owner as part of the recipient identification process. We saw the evidence of the pandemic in their faces, their voices.”

4. Limited direction from the U.S. Treasury as to how federal CARES money could be expended.

5. The technological difficulties of working remotely, and so the Economic Development team worked onsite. However, “this situation corrected when the new computers were issued,” Armijo said.

THE EDGE

BUSINESS & PERSONAL RESOURCES - UPDATED

The Edge was a constant communication tool in a time of uncertainty. Each issue reminded business owners of the assistance that was available and how Bernalillo County could help.
BERNALILLO COUNTY @ ALVARADO SQUARE

Facilities Construction Program manager Shiree Mckenzie remembers two “dark days” during her time leading the Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square project.

The first was March 23, 2020, when Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that all residents were to remain in their homes and all non-essential businesses would close. “We were three days shy of a year into a massive two-year project,” Mckenzie said. “A lot of time, money, and jobs were on the line. We had 100 to 200 laborers on the job site every day. This was their livelihood.”

The second day was May 12, 2021, when “we were one day away from our contractual substantial completion date,” Mckenzie said. “We had an extraordinary amount of work that led up to this date. Trying to wrap everything up and hit the finish line was hard. I don’t think I slept at all that week!”

Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square was completed on time and on budget. This is quite an accomplishment, despite its final year of construction being hampered by a worldwide pandemic that forced planners to modify the building design to make it COVID-19 safe. That modification, called “Change Order #5,” is a top accomplishment, Mckenzie said.

The change order – at a cost of $1.1 million (plus $88,826.54 in New Mexico gross receipts taxes) of CARES Act funding – allowed planners to add COVID-19 mitigation enhancements to ensure employees’ safety when they returned to work. However, the money had to be spent by the CARES Act deadline of Dec. 31, 2020.

Numerous employees from across county departments sat on 16 subcommittees that were dedicated to the renovation and opening of Alvarado Square, Mckenzie said. In addition, the county asked in June of 2020 its design-build partners to assess COVID-19 implications to the project, she said.

The return-to-work assessment, called “Right Things In Right Things Out,” offered to county leadership 176 recommendations based on original project goals and the guidelines set forth by the

14 https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2020/03/23/state-enacts-further-restrictions-to-stop-spread-including-stay-at-home-instruction/
federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the State of New Mexico, and professional construction organizations.

Focusing on employee well-being, the county received a 2-star Fitwel certification. This is the first certified project in the State of New Mexico, McKenzie said.

“Alvarado Square is the healthiest building in our inventory and is situated well for keeping our staff healthy for years to come,” she said.

**Top Accomplishments**

1. Pivoting one year into a $55 million construction project to mitigate project delays, cost increases, and implement Change Order #5. The change order also had an expenditure deadline of Dec. 30, 2020, in order for the changes to be funded by the CARES Act.

2. Creation of a subcommittee to oversee all “return to work” efforts at Alvarado Square and then communicate relevant information to staff via three live broadcast forums.

3. Successful completion of the largest construction project in recent county history, on time and on budget.

4. The construction team was considered essential, and so HB Construction implemented robust rules of engagement to keep everyone safe and mitigate exposure.

5. The use of “Viewpoint,” an HB Construction communication dashboard that allowed the team to follow social distancing guidelines while sharing and reviewing documents, plans, and other project-related items.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Creation of a safe construction site to keep the project on schedule without major outbreaks of COVID-19. McKenzie said there was only one time when the site was closed for 10 days because of an outbreak in December of 2020.

2. Responding to the “Right Things In Right Things Out” recommendations to order items without fully understanding how COVID-19 was being spread.
## Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square

### Subcommittees and Employee Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee Name</th>
<th>Members (Chair/Co-Chairs in bold)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Building Design/Construction</td>
<td><strong>Shiree Mckenzie</strong>, Commissioners Debbie O’Malley and Charlene Pyskoty, HB Construction and Dekker-Perich Sabatini representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Budget</td>
<td><strong>Jennifer Gallegos</strong>, Lisa Manwill, Shirley Ragin, Denise Benavidez, Pamela Moon, Ryan Travelstead, Stephanie Sanchez, Mario Ruiz, Heidi Warren, Elias Archuleta, Shiree Mckenzie, Timothy Olivas, Dana Sanchez, Lisa Thompson, Kevin Noel, Monica Roybal-Gaitan, and Annie Baca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Change Management</td>
<td><strong>Amanda Colburn, Tia Bland</strong>, Tina, Tomlin, Tracy Dingmann, Jerome Starke, Pamela Moon, Carrie Moritomo, Veronica Ortega, Paul Evans, Corina Cortez, Meaghan Ellsworth, Carlos Sanchez, Catherine Lopez, Cory Geanis, Enrico Gradi, Fabian Montoya, Jorge Estrada, Larry Gallegos, Michelle Aguilar, Terry Kelly, Tom Thorpe, Tiffany Chamblee, Ashley Martinez, Diane Chavez, Carl Broach, Shiree Mckenzie, Martin Gallegos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
<td><strong>Tia Bland</strong>, Tracy Dingmann, Jorge Estrada, Larry Gallegos, Terry Kelly, Tom Thorpe, Tiffany Chamblee, Shiree Mckenzie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customer Service Center</td>
<td><strong>Jessica Slater</strong>, Chair; <strong>Carl Broach</strong>, Co-chair; Lisa Sedillo-White (Committee DCM sponsor); Enrico Gradi, Chayenne Gutierrez, Greg Perez, Nancy Beare, Irene Serna, Shirley Ragin, Michelle Aguilar, Cory Geanis, Robert Benavidez, Lisa Manwill, Veronica Ortega, Steve Miera, Elie Boujaoude, Lori Frank, Debbie Jo Almager, Amanda Colburn, Tia Bland, Diane Chavez, Tracy Dingmann, Meaghan Ellsworth, Shiree Mckenzie, Bruce Lambert, Michelle Kavanaugh, Kenneth Scott</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Employee Wellness</strong></td>
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HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced county employees into lockdown, the Human Resources Department dived into developing processes and administrative instructions to assist in the shift of how the county does business.

“The one good thing COVID did was force us to automate forms,” Director Bernadette Perez said. “We used to do everything with paper. It wasn’t perfect, but it did enable us to get the work done and to continue operating. Employees got paid. We were able to process paperwork.”

Like workplaces across the nation, the county had a flexible work policy (Administrative Instruction No. HR08) adopted in February 2020. The policy had to be updated when the New Mexico governor issued stay-at-home orders in March.

A remote work policy, like the county’s that was adopted in July 2021, is now the standard bearer for workplaces, and not just in New Mexico. According to the Society for Human Resources Professionals (SHRM), 4.7 million people in the United States are currently telecommuting - an increase from 3.9 million people in 2015.\(^{15}\)

This trend will likely continue as Perez echoed what so many county directors have said about the county’s new way of doing remote business.

“Staff had to convert their living room or kitchen into a workplace,” Perez said. “They didn’t really want to work from home. Now, it’s the opposite. … It’s part of recruitment and retention. It’s part of that home-work life balance. In order to stay competitive, it does need to stay.”

In addition to helping county leaders develop a new remote work policy, the Human Resources team had to adjust the way it issued paychecks and had to develop a COVID-19 leave process.

“That was rough,” Perez said of the COVID-19 leave process. “I had to develop that from scratch. Forms, process, payroll, finance, and

HR were trying to put all of that together. It needed to be effective pretty quickly.”

One of the highlights of a challenging year was the hiring of 67 high school students in a summer internship program funded by the federal government as part of pandemic relief efforts. The Human Resources team put together an application in a mere two weeks.

“We hired two new employees,” Perez said. “Young people got the experience of working at various county departments.”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. The automation of forms, using Adobe Sign for easier routing between HR, a department, and an employee.

2. The transitioning of employees to direct deposit, an accomplishment also cited by Finance Director Shirley Ragin. “We had a lot of people with manual checks,” Ragin said. “It was a huge expense to send them their checks by certified mail” because employees were in lockdown.

3. The Summer Enrichment Program and the hiring of 67 high school students.

4. The development and opening of the employee wellness center.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Teleworking posed challenges to using the 11 different systems utilized by the Human Resources Department.

2. Ensuring all staff had the technological equipment to work from home.

3. The use of personal cell phones during the primary election to help the County Clerk’s staff hire poll workers. Ring Central was not up and running right away.

4. Implementing a COVID-19 leave policy.

5. Union negotiations and developing a system to meet in person while complying with COVID safety protocols. “We used three different rooms at the Atrium and connected with Teams,” Perez said. “That was really effective.”
LESSONS LEARNED: COUNTY MANAGER

Training:

• There was no formal training on how to use Adobe Sign and other applications that were needed to continue business. Both departments praise the staff of the Information Technology Department for offering personal assistance and training on such programs.

• No formal clearinghouse for Human Resource departments to seek guidance when developing new policies, such as COVID-19 leave, that were developed from scratch.

Protocols/Policies:

• Updated policies will reflect efficient electronic systems like Adobe Sign for easier routing between departments, personnel, and customers. Another advantage: less paper.

• Design-build project delivery method allows the county a great amount of flexibility and saves taxpayer money.

• Employee wellness should be a consideration in every capital improvement project undertaken by the county.

Communication:

• Windows Teams made it possible to conduct business in the “new normal” with local company owners and out-of-city clients with business projects and interest in the county.

• BernCo Connect was vital in getting information to staff members.

Staffing:

• The summer internship program proved to be a successful start to introducing the county to young people in the community. It will continue.

• A small staff strained resources in the Economic Development Department. The accomplishments achieved are a testament to the dedication of the staff.

• Identification of staff who cannot work from a home computer and placement in another area where they can be of service.

Technology:

• There was a learning curve when initially using Adobe Sign, and then realizing that an application with increased efficiency and faster delivery required a more robust approach. The county’s Information Technology Department was crucial in designing and implementing improved and enhanced applications for delivery of small business grants.

• The use of multiple computer applications in the Human Resources Department created challenges in getting any type of data for reporting.
• The use of personal cell phones at the beginning of the pandemic caused concern. Ring Central took some time to get fully implemented across departments.

• Some county employees do not have internet at home. What do these employees do in a remote work environment?
While most businesses and offices were shut down during 2020 and residents were being asked to stay at home as much as possible, hundreds of people were coming in and out of the Bureau of Elections’ Voting Machine Warehouse on a daily basis. A primary and general election were scheduled, and the COVID-19 virus was not going to stop them from occurring.

Tabulators needed to be certified. Poll officials needed to be trained. Election sites needed to be supplied and set up. After the elections, the votes needed to be canvassed.

Bureau of Elections (BOE) administrator Nathan Jaramillo said his top challenge was balancing the health and safety of his staff with the need to administer those elections.

“That was a difficult area to navigate,” Jaramillo said. “I do want you to be safe and to exhibit a caring attitude. But you also need to get the job done. Where is that fine balance?”

One of the most difficult times occurred the day after the General Election on Nov. 4, 2020, Jaramillo said. The virus spread quickly through the absentee board and staff members.

“So many people got sick,” Jaramillo said. “John (Keel) helped us organize a drive-through testing site in the front of the BOE warehouse where everyone got tested. No one could come back until they tested negative.”

It was during canvass, and only four employees were able to work. Other staff tested positive, and others waited a long time for test results. “The four of us worked nights, weekends,” Jaramillo said. “You have to hit the target date. It’s a statutory deadline. So we said, ‘Let’s try to get it down.’ We did hit it.”

A huge lesson learned from the outbreak was the need for the department to emphasize cross-training to have a backup bench of employees who can seamlessly transition to other projects should somebody become immediately unavailable, Jaramillo said.

Jaramillo has a long list of accomplishments of his team and said the team could not have
been as successful without other Bernalillo County employees stepping up to help clean and sanitize 20 Early Voting and 72 Election Day sites.

Top Accomplishments

1. Providing safe and secure primary and general elections in 2020 and special congressional district and local elections in 2021.

2. The successful collaboration and coordination with various departments throughout Bernalillo County to create a safe voting environment.

3. Besides the one outbreak in November 2020, staff and Election Board members remained safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Biggest Challenges

1. Operating in person during the peak of COVID-19.

2. Coordinating a multi-level emergency health plan with various departments as well as the general public to accomplish safe and secure voting locations.

3. The BOE’s status of being critical infrastructure, which did not allow the option of working from home.

4. The struggles in hiring and retaining Election Board members and temporary employees because the majority of poll officials and temporary employees were older and fell under the high-risk category for COVID-19.

5. Working elections with fewer staff members, which meant increased workloads and extra hours of work, including weekends and holidays.

6. Space constraints at the Voting Machine Warehouse and the One Civic Plaza office made it hard to maintain social distancing.
TREASURER’S OFFICE

The Treasurer’s Office is the bread and butter for multiple governmental agencies. If property taxes are not collected, then thousands of people are impacted, from employees to the customers served by the agencies.

From Albuquerque Public Schools, Central New Mexico Community College and charter schools, to city and villages, and to Bernalillo County itself, property taxes are distributed and comprise a large portion of these entities’ budgets. Treasurer Nancy Bearce cites the collection and distribution of property taxes as one of her team’s greatest accomplishments.

“Continuing tax collections when you’re closed is quite challenging,” Bearce said. “We didn’t miss a beat.”

A vast majority of property taxes – up to 90% – are automatically paid by mortgage companies, Bearce said. But there are residents who do pay their own taxes and they expect a certain level of customer service, she said.

“They would ask, ‘I want a receipt. How am I getting a receipt?’” Bearce said. “We said, ‘We’ll put it in the mail, or we’ll meet you outdoors on the sidewalk and deliver your receipt to you. We were innovative in how to collect. We did sidewalk transactions.’”

Among the creative ways the Treasurer’s Office helped property tax owners pay their bills and follow social distancing guidelines were to install five drop boxes throughout the county. The office also solidified partnerships with First Financial and Rio Grande credit unions to take payments. And in April of 2021, the office initiated an online payment site.

Bearce also touts that her team was one of the first departments to transition to Ring Central almost immediately after the pandemic forced everyone to work from home. “We had to have some way to communicate,” Bearce said. “To suddenly have the software installed and staff trained on it, and to just say, ‘Go!’”

Top Accomplishments

1. Ring Central and implementation of a remote call center.
2. Continuation of tax collections.
3. The staff and their ability to think outside of the box. Bearce said: “Truly, the staff came
through. “They said, ‘We have our mission. Let’s get it done.’ They were the true show-stoppers in all of this.”

4. The numerous collaborations within the county and outside of the county.

   a. Information Technology Department, which Bearce credits with assisting the team in getting the remote call center set up and acquiring laptops quickly so employees could continue their work at home.

   b. City of Albuquerque security personnel, who helped Treasurer’s Office staff who remained onsite at the payment centers.

   c. Numerous employees, community members, and partner agencies who helped with language translation services.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Ring Central implementation and training to use it.

2. The suddenness of the COVID-19 shutdown. Bearce recalled how the City of Albuquerque told everyone at One Civic Plaza that all city buildings would be closed as of 5 p.m. on March 24, 2020. 16

   “We only had four hours from the time the mayor said he was closing and we were told we had to be out,” Bearce said. “So we’re having to figure out quickly, ‘Who’s going to stay?’ ‘Who has laptops?’ Lots of people didn’t have laptops. Fortunately, the laptops were already ordered. IT prioritized who got the laptops. We were in second-half collection mode, so we couldn’t NOT have the laptops.”

3. Navigating the emotional toll of the pandemic on staff members, some of whom lost family members to the COVID-19 virus.

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The award for the most creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic might have to go to the Office of the Assessor. After all, it’s not every day that you can use a baby monitor for anything other than listening to your sleeping baby in another room!

But that’s exactly what the Assessor’s Office did. When COVID-19 shut down all county offices and residents were told to work from home on March 16, the Assessor’s Office leadership team quickly put a plan in place to provide to property owners one more option of accessibility besides mail, email, and phone calls.

With the annual spring mailing of the Notices of Value statements just around the corner, the office knew activities would increase with questions from property owners, such as how to file an appeal, and the need to file for exemptions or other pertinent property ownership information paperwork. What to do to keep business running, ensure accessibility, and get the phone calls answered?

“Lucky for us, our building was once a bank with a drive-thru and walk-up window, and with some creative quick solutions and teamwork, the assessor’s walk-up windows initiative began and opened to the public on April 28, 2020!” Assessor Tanya Giddings said.

“The hilarious part is the intercom was old and didn’t work and we had to create solutions immediately. With limited intercom equipment resources, we used baby monitors!”

With the help of Facilities and Information Technology departments, the assessor’s staff transformed a drive-thru to a walk-up window and the motor bank into a functional working space, where the assessor’s staff could assist the public directly and maintain social distancing. The transmitter portion of the baby monitor was attached to the outside of the window with Velcro. The wire was strung through the window and the portable receiver of the baby monitor was operated by an employee.
“The person on the inside would press a button to converse,” Giddings said. “On the outside, you didn’t have to press a button. They were the greatest. Whenever the public came up, they said they could hear clearly!”

**Top Accomplishments**

1. The collaboration of the entire Assessor’s Office team working together to continue to serve the public and provide the best customer service while meeting all statutory deadlines.

   “From day one, we were taking phone calls,” said Deputy Assessor Michelle Aguilar. “Nobody was getting an answering machine. We also had the walk-up windows. If someone came to the office or called, they were taken care of.”

2. The Information Technology Department set up Ring Central for Assessor staff, who were among the first county employees (along with Treasurer’s Office employees) to use the new technology. Ring Central increased process efficiencies, and Giddings and her team associate the efficiencies with a decrease in valuation protests in 2020.

   Deputy Assessor Clyde Ward said: “Right when we mailed the Notices of Value, on that first day, over 800 calls came in. Those calls went directly to certified appraisers. Ring Central allowed us to do that, with the appraisers working remotely from home.”

3. Recognizing that a once used motor bank with a drive-thru and a walk-up window used for storage could be transformed and utilized as two walk-up windows and devising a system in which a baby monitor allowed for one-on-one customer service while also keeping socially distant and safe.

   “The Assessor’s office walk-up windows initiative came to an end on Aug. 11, 2021, when we moved to the new county office building. In total, we were able to assist 8,736 constituents in a healthy and safe manner while our office remained closed to the public,” Giddings said.

4. The transition from paper products to technology in the field was accelerated.

**Biggest Challenges**

1. Technology and using it remotely.

   • Ring Central was challenging. Everyone received a crash course. In addition, each of the assessor’s 10 departments needed to use it at various times, depending on the department’s workload and individual internal timelines. Aguilar said there was a lot of
moving teams and groups on and off the phones in order to continuously take high-volume phone calls. “That took a lot of communication and identifying workloads and deadlines,” Aguilar said.

• Not all employees had internet access at home, and not all employees understood technology jargon, such as “VPN,” said Ward. “VPN became a term that people soon understood,” he said.

• Developing other processes so that work would be done to meet statutory deadlines. Such processes included digital signatures, virtual valuation board hearings, and working collaboratively with city and county planners to electronically receive floor plans of new improvements for inclusion on the tax rolls.

2. Training employees, especially new hires who came on right when COVID-19 forced everyone online. “We were not prepared to conduct training virtually,” Giddings said.

3. Hybrid work schedules had to be altered often ensuring phone calls and department workloads were being met while conforming to allowable in-office percentage mandates and making sure everyone was safe.
LESSONS LEARNED: ELECTED OFFICIALS

Training:

- Cross-training is essential so tasks can be accomplished when a team member becomes immediately unavailable.
- Continued training in the use of new software and applications unveiled during the pandemic.

Communication:

- Determine points of contact and communication with various Bernalillo County departments during an emergency situation, especially among departments whose staff are working in other areas.
- For many segments of the population, phone calls, face-to-face conversations, and paper communications are still the only way that public service can be done.
- Communication with state departments regarding personal protective equipment and other emergency-related topics should be more streamlined.

Staffing:

- The use of county employees to fill gaps in the departments that are considered critical infrastructure.
- Staff need a pay increase and acknowledgement for the hard work they do for the county.
- Organizational restructuring to alleviate knowledge gaps.

Technology:

- Continued use of Windows Teams and other remote conferencing tools.
- Ring Central works well.
- Not every employee has Internet capability at home.
TIMELINE OF A PANDEMIC

Note

Feb. 27, 2020
Bernalillo County’s Department of Emergency Management reports to employees that it is monitoring the coronavirus disease and is in contact with the state Department of Health daily. It also attaches a FAQ on how to stay safe.

March 2, 2020
Bernalillo County Fire Department sends memo discussing guidelines for decontaminating units that transport patients suspected of having COVID-19.

March 6, 2020
Office of Emergency Management reports it is in an “enhanced monitoring status” but does not have immediate plans to activate the Emergency Operations Center. It does ask departments to identify primary and alternate staff in the event the EOC is activated and reports it is updating its Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP), response plans, and telework possibilities.

March 9, 2020
Bernalillo County Fire Department sends memo discussing N95 supply shortages and guidelines for how to conserve masks.

March 10, 2020
N.M. Department of Health begins requesting periodic inventory levels of personal protective equipment.

March 11, 2020
New Mexico announces its first presumptive positive case of coronavirus and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham proclaims a public health emergency.

March 12, 2020
County Manager Julie Morgas Baca issues order that all U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines are to be followed. In addition, all county events with attendance projections of 100 or more people are canceled. Identification of essential personnel in each department is begun. Community centers, meal sites, and fitness centers remain open.

March 13, 2020
- The Information Technology Department reports to employees their ability to use Microsoft collaboration and productivity systems via the internet, such as Windows Teams.
- New Mexico closes K-12 public schools to prevent potential spread of COVID-19.
- County Emergency Operations Center is activated to Level 3, the lowest level of activation.

March 15, 2020
- State of New Mexico directives are instituted in the county: Various departments and county buildings close at noon and will remain closed through April 15, 2020. Employees are categorized into essential (report to work a normal); non-essential (telework from home); and non-essential (remain at home but available for call-in as needed).

17 All events are documented from Bernalillo County news releases and/or state of New Mexico news archives https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2020/03/page/10/
• County leaders meet to discuss the COVID-19 emergency and prepare to address the Board of County Commissioners.

March 16, 2020
County Manager Julie Morgas Baca reports that all county employees who are deemed non-essential are required to work remotely through April 15, 2020.

March 17, 2020
• The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meets in emergency session and passes Administrative Resolution 2020-29 declaring all of Bernalillo County’s unincorporated area as an emergency area. The BCC also passes an ordinance that gives civil emergency powers to the county manager.
• The State of New Mexico secures Small Business Administration disaster loan assistance for businesses.

March 18, 2020
• New Mexico declares order prohibiting gatherings of more than 10 people and asks travelers entering New Mexico from outside the state to self-isolate for 14 days.
• Emergency Operations Center status increases to Level 2: Fully-staffed command and general staff and seven emergency support functions are in direct contact to facilitate flow of requests for supplies and direct funding.
• County requests disaster assistance relief of $100,000 from State of New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. ESF 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, and 15 supporting the EOC. Justification: Park and Rec staff support community food distribution; Bernalillo County Fire Department responding to COVID-19 medical calls; Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office supporting operations; Public Works supporting cleaning operations. A critical need for personal protective equipment is needed for county employees, first responders, health, and medical workers.

March 23, 2020
Bernalillo County installs handwashing stations at several county facilities to help protect employees and the public.

March 23, 2020
New Mexico institutes order that all non-essential businesses will close and all non-essential workers should work from home. New Mexico residents instructed to shelter in place.

March 24, 2020
• New Mexico reports 100 COVID-19 cases.
• Bernalillo County closes majority of facilities and business to be conducted online and via email and drop box services.
• First mask distribution at eight locations.

March 25, 2020
New Mexico reports the state’s first death related to COVID-19.

March 26, 2020
Bernalillo County and its partners begin planning for delivery of food items to families and senior citizens in need.

March 27, 2020
• The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) is passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump. The county is a direct recipient of $31.8 million of the funds.
• New Mexico extends closings of K-12 schools.
Air travelers entering New Mexico are ordered to self-isolate for at least 14 days.

March 29, 2020
County continues mask distribution at eight locations.

March 31, 2020
Bernalillo County manager suspends single-use plastic bag ban for 60 days.

April 1, 2020
- Administrative Instruction No. CM09 goes into effect. It directs all employees equipped and directed to remote work must do so, and all employees who must report to work in person must do so.
- Administrative Instruction No. CM10 goes into effect. It requires employees who travel out of the State of New Mexico to self-isolate for a period of 14 days and notify his/her department director of such travel.

April 6, 2020
New Mexico governor extends emergency order to April 30.

April 7, 2020
Bernalillo County extends closure of facilities and teleworking to April 30.

April 11, 2020
- New Mexico reports 1,174 COVID-19 cases and 20 deaths.
- Mass gatherings ban expanded to include New Mexico houses of worship.

April 14, 2020
Bernalillo County provides non-potable water to residents of To’Hajiilee.

April 15, 2020
Bernalillo County Commission approves biennial budget. Revenue and expense contingencies are incorporated into the fiscal year 2021-22 budget, include delaying implementation of various initiatives and related expenses or the total removal of these initiatives from the budget.

April 16, 2020
Bernalillo County employees are asked to sign up for direct deposit as a fast and convenient way to get paid.

April 22, 2020
Bernalillo County extends closure and teleworking to May 15.

April 28, 2020
Bernalillo County Commission accepts and approves $31.8 million in CARES grant funding from the federal government. The receipt of the money sets in motion an increase in assistance to constituents.

April 30, 2020
New Mexico’s emergency public health order is extended through May 15, but the state announces it is entering “Preparation Phase” with several restrictions being relaxed:

1. Restaurants and dine-in businesses can offer curbside and delivery service.
2. Grocers and essential retail services must operate at 20% capacity.
3. Non-essential retailers must offer curbside pickup and delivery if their business license allows it.
4. State parks reopen on modified day-use-only basis.
5. Golf courses may open to golf only.
6. Pet services may operate.

May 1, 2020
State of New Mexico, in response to Gallup mayor request, invokes the state Riot Control Act to put Gallup, N.M., on lockdown. All roads into Gallup are closed.

May 5, 2020
- New Mexico orders businesses to require cloth face coverings of all employees and visitors as part of the first phase of reopening New Mexico.

May 6, 2020
Bernalillo County provides non-potable water to residents outside of Gallup.

May 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 5,069 COVID-19 cases and 208 deaths related to COVID-19.

May 13, 2020
New Mexico extends emergency public health order to May 31.

May 15, 2020
- New Mexico requires face coverings in public, with exceptions for eating, drinking, and exercise and allows all retailers and houses of worship to operate at 25% of their maximum occupancy.
- Bernalillo County extends closure and telework.

May 16, 2020
- Administrative Instruction No. CM11 goes into effect, outlining the county’s phased approach to reopening, which will correspond to the state requirements:
  1. Phase One – Limited reopening of county facilities with no more than 25% staffing.
  2. Phase Two – Limited reopening of county facilities with no more than 75% staffing.
  3. Phase Three – Staffing percentages may increase, while mitigation strategies remain in place.
  4. Return to Normal Operations – When the State of New Mexico determines that this COVID-19 emergency is no longer a threat, or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officially ends the pandemic.

May 22, 2020
New Mexico orders state flags to half-staff through Memorial Day weekend to honor victims of COVID-19.

May 28, 2020
New Mexico eases restrictions, allowing gyms and restaurants to open for indoor services at 50% capacity; and allowing malls, hair and nail salons, barber shops, tattoo parlors, and massage services to begin operating at 25% capacity.

June 2, 2020
The Bernalillo County Clerk’s Office holds the primary election as planned at 68 voting centers. BernCo staff mitigate COVID-19 dangers.
June 4, 2020
The county remains in Phase One of the reopening process.

June 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 9,367 COVID-19 cases and 420 deaths.

June 12, 2020
County Manager postpones implementation of the Wellness Act, which requires businesses in unincorporated Bernalillo County with two or more employees to offer paid time off.

June 18, 2020
Special session of New Mexico Legislature convenes to consider tax relief for individuals, loans for small businesses and local governments, election protections, and modification of the state budget because of projected declines in state revenues as a result of the economic effects of COVID-19.

June 21, 2020
No-cost COVID testing becomes available in Bernalillo County for food service and other workers. Vaccinations are administered on a tier system as specified by State of New Mexico guidelines. In addition, vaccination registration is required.

July 1, 2020
New Mexico extends emergency public health order through July 15 as COVID-19 cases begin to rise again.

July 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 14,773 COVID-19 cases and 543 deaths.

July 13, 2020
- New Mexico reenacts restrictions due to rising case counts. Among them: indoor dining at restaurants and breweries are prohibited; out-of-state visitors at state parks are forbidden; and face coverings must be worn while exercising at indoor gyms and fitness centers.
- Bernalillo County requires masks in all county facilities.

July 17, 2020
Emergency Management Director Richard Clark reports that 1,900 possible COVID-19 cases have been identified among Bernalillo County employees since April, with most of the cases being at the Sheriff’s Office, Metropolitan Detention Center, and Fire & Rescue.

July 30, 2020
New Mexico extends emergency public health order through Aug. 28.

Aug. 6, 2020
New Mexico revises public health order to require individuals arriving in New Mexico to quarantine for at least 14 days from the date of their entry into New Mexico. The order includes some exceptions for New Mexicans.

Aug. 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 22,643 cases of COVID-19 and 693 deaths.

Aug. 14, 2020
Bernalillo County offers free COVID-19 testing to employees and their immediate family members.
Aug. 20, 2020
Bernalillo County begins preparations for Phase Two reopening, including developing return to work checklists and training COVID coordinators.

Aug. 29, 2020
New Mexico revises emergency public health order to increase occupancy rates at houses of worship and food and drink establishments. It also raises public gathering sizes from five to 10.

Sept. 9, 2020
The county Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Department opens all-day care at four community centers with limited number of slots available.

Sept. 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 26,563 COVID-19 cases and 818 deaths.

Sept. 22, 2020
The county remains in Phase One of reopening.

Oct. 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 32,983 COVID-19 cases and 911 deaths.

Oct. 16, 2020
- New Mexico tightens emergency public health order after record-breaking daily COVID-19 infection rates. Among the requirements are that food and drink establishments must close at 10 p.m. each night and hotel occupancy rates are reduced to 60% for lodging establishments that have completed a state-certified training program (25% for all others). Mass gatherings of more than five individuals are again prohibited.
- County Manager Julie Morgas Baca and County Clerk Linda Stover announce mitigation efforts, including sanitizing and social distancing protocols, to ensure the general election is safe for voters. In addition, the Bernalillo County District Attorney’s Office announces that it will prosecute anyone who seeks to intimidate voters or disrupt the elections process.

Oct. 17, 2020
Early voting begins in Bernalillo County at 18 early voting locations.

Oct. 20, 2020
The county updates Administrative Instructions No. CM10, that employees who are planning to travel out of state must inform their immediate supervisors with a “Request for Out of State Travel” form.

Oct. 23, 2020
New Mexico announces enhanced mitigation efforts, including targeting high-risk hotspot places of business that report clusters of infections.

Nov. 3, 2020
The Bernalillo County Clerk’s Office holds the general election at 68 election locations. Bernalillo County employees assist in sanitizing and enforcing social distancing guidelines at polling locations.

Nov. 11, 2020
New Mexico reports 59,034 COVID-19 cases and 1,158 deaths.

Nov. 13, 2020
• New Mexico hits “reset,” reenacting most heightened level of statewide public health restrictions. All non-essential activities are closed because of a spike in COVID-19 cases.
• The county follows reset-shelter in place guidance and closes nonessential/non-public safety business operations within the county through Nov. 30.

Nov. 19, 2020
New Mexico restricts “big box” stores and other large retailers from operating in-person services.

Nov. 23, 2020
New Mexico Legislature is again called to Santa Fe for a special session that will address a $330 million relief package for residents adversely affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Nov. 30, 2020
New Mexico announces “Red to Green” system for New Mexico counties, with counties operating under one of three levels: red, or very high risk; yellow, or high risk; and green, medium risk.

Dec. 1, 2020
The county returns to Phase One operations.

Dec. 2, 2020
New Mexico becomes the 37th state to record 100,000 cases of COVID-19.

Dec. 9, 2020
Office of Emergency Management asks employees in a countywide survey whether they will get the COVID-19 vaccine. More than 900 employees respond.

Dec. 11, 2020
• New Mexico reports 116,565 COVID-19 cases and 1,889 deaths.
• The federal Food and Drug Administration issues an emergency use authorization for the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

Dec. 14, 2020
New Mexico receives its first shipment of 17,550 doses of the coronavirus vaccines and institutes a phased tier system of distribution. Front-line health workers and first responders are among the first to receive a vaccine.

Dec. 16, 2020
New Mexico amends public health order, allowing an increased capacity inside essential retail spaces, dependent on a county’s red, yellow, or green status.

Dec. 18, 2020
The federal Food and Drug Administration issues an emergency use authorization for the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Dec. 29, 2020
The State of New Mexico launches free at-home, self-administered COVID-19 saliva tests.

Dec. 31, 2020
On the last day of the year, New Mexico reports 142,864 COVID-19 cases. Bernalillo County’s case count is 40,808.

Jan. 11, 2021
- New Mexico reports 157,087 COVID-19 cases and 2,764 deaths.
- The county seeks volunteers as it prepares to launch vaccination clinics at county locations.

Feb. 11, 2021
- New Mexico reports that Bernalillo County is among the 15 counties at the Yellow Level. Another four counties are at the Green Level.
- New Mexico eases quarantine rules for out-of-state visitors.

Feb. 11, 2021
The county rescinds Administrative Instruction No. CM10, regarding travel restrictions.

Feb. 24, 2021
New Mexico modifies color-coded framework, adding a Turquoise Level, or the least restrictive level where all categories of business can operate indoors with minimal occupancy limitations.

March 10, 2021
New Mexico reports seven counties have been elevated to Turquoise Level; 18 counties are at Yellow Level, seven counties at Green Level, and only one county at the Red Level.

March 24, 2021
New Mexico reports 13 counties at Turquoise Level; 10 counties at Yellow Level, 10 counties at Green Level, and no county at the Red Level.

April 26, 2021
Bernalillo County issues a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document regarding the new COVID-19 vaccines in an effort to alleviate fears. FAQs come from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New Mexico Department of Health.

April 28, 2021
New Mexico announces that when 60% of eligible New Mexico residents have been fully vaccinated, the state will graduate out of the color-coded county risk system and remove most pandemic-related restrictions.

May 5, 2021
New Mexico reports 30 of 33 counties may operate at the Turquoise Level, where there are fewer restrictions on day-to-day activities.

May 13, 2021
Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square construction is substantially completed. Move-in plans begin to take shape.

May 14, 2021
New Mexico adopts the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated guidance that allows individuals who are fully vaccinated to no longer have to wear face masks indoors or outdoors.
May 17, 2021
Bernalillo County’s Administrative Instruction No. CM12 is implemented to replace CM09 and CM11. The new directive allows departments to be staffed at 55% at indoor maximum capacity and 100% at outdoor capacity. However, masks and social distancing requirements remain the same.

June 24, 2021
County Manager Julie Morgas Baca announces the county will reopen all offices on July 1.

June 30, 2021
New Mexico reports that 62% of eligible New Mexico residents have completed the full vaccination series and 71% have received at least one dose.

July 1, 2021
- New Mexico removes remaining pandemic occupancy restrictions on commercial and day-to-day activities, including the color-coded county system.
- Bernalillo County reopens for all except Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square employees, who will follow their move-in schedules.

July 5, 2021
Employees begin moving into Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square.

July 6, 2021
Bernalillo County’s wellness center opens for appointments.

July 8, 2021
The county Human Resources Department issues Administrative Instruction No. HR10, which allows for certain employees to have the ability to remote work as a means of recruiting and retaining employees.

July 12, 2021
The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention labels the Delta variant of the coronavirus as a variant of concern and is the dominant form of the coronavirus in the United States.19

July 27, 2021
The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention releases updated guidance regarding vaccination urgency and mask mandates because of an increase in COVID-19 cases after a steady decline in cases since January 2021. It also urges mask wearing because of new data showing the Delta variant is more infectious even among vaccinated individuals.

Aug. 2, 2021
Bernalillo County requires masks to be worn in all indoor county offices when two or more people are in a common space. Employees working alone in their own workspace do not have to wear a mask.

Aug. 3, 2021
Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square grand opening celebration is postponed because of increase in COVID-19 cases.

Aug. 16, 2021
Bernalillo County @ Alvarado Square opens to customers.

Aug. 13, 2021
The county directs employees to work alternating A/B schedules to ensure social distancing.

Aug. 17, 2021
New Mexico temporarily reinstates a statewide requirement that facemasks be worn in all public indoor spaces, regardless of vaccination status, because of an increase in COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations that are mostly caused by the Delta variant.

Sept. 13, 2021
County Manager Julie Morgas Baca offers incentive leave of two shifts for employees who get vaccinated and upload their vaccination cards.

Sept. 15, 2021
New Mexico extends indoor mask requirement through Oct. 15.

Oct. 15, 2021
New Mexico extends indoor mask requirement through Nov. 11.

Nov. 12, 2021
- New Mexico expands eligibility for the COVID-19 booster shot to all New Mexico adults 18 years old and older.
- New Mexico extends mask requirements through Dec. 10.

Nov. 15, 17, and 19, 2021
The county provides flu shot/COVID booster shot clinics for employees and their dependents.

Dec. 3, 2021
The county offers a COVID vaccination clinic for employees, their dependents, and the general public at the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

Dec. 7, 2021
New Mexico reports 324,311 COVID-19 cases and 5,419 deaths.

Dec. 17, 2021
New Mexico reports 335,617 COVID-19 cases and 5,549 deaths.