

Proposal for Acequia Capacity-Building

NM Acequia Association and NM Acequia Commission

August 14, 2026

Executive Summary

This proposal represents a collaborative effort of the New Mexico Acequia Commission (NMAC, or “Commission”) and New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA), with independent facilitation support from Ryan Golten from the [Consensus Building Institute](#) (CBI). The focus of this effort is to propose specific budget and policy recommendations for the 2027 legislative session that will build capacity in two ways: 1) strengthening the role of NMAC as a body that advises on policy development and serves as a resource to acequias; and 2) codifying the Acequia and Community Ditch Education Program (ACDEP) which supports acequias statewide with education and technical assistance.

Acequias and community ditches are facing the greatest challenges of their centuries-old existence including drought, development pressures, fire and flood disasters, and an aging population. While NMAA, as a membership-based non-profit, has built a community-based institution for acequia advocacy, education, and technical assistance, NMAC continues to lack basic resources to fulfill its statutory mandate of serving as an advisory body and information resource on acequias to state government. Our proposal aims to build capacity for NMAC while also seeking to institutionalize resources that provide services to acequias, building upon the experience and expertise in existing programs such as those provided by NMAA.

NMAA and NMAC jointly propose the following:

- Increase NMAC’s budget to \$405,500. This budget would enable the NMAC to hire 2.0 FTE while covering operational expenses and contractual services.
- Codify the Acequia and Community Ditch Education Program (ACDEP) in statute to clearly define the purpose of the program and ensure quality and continuity of services.
- Amend the NMAC statute to better serve acequias’ growing needs and grant NMAC a meaningful role in administering the ACDEP.

Context for this Joint Proposal

Together, NMAC and NMAA represent the core infrastructure supporting, representing and advocating for acequias in New Mexico. Representing decades of experience, our two entities come out of years of organizing and advocacy among traditional *hispano* and land-based community leaders in New Mexico to ensure acequias are protected and enduring. A traditional refrain is that the water is the lifeblood of our communities and the acequias are the veins.

Acequias have a centuries-old history in New Mexico. The vision of NMAA and NMAC leadership is that acequias and community ditches continue to exist and thrive in their communities. Further, we envision the state recognizing the significance of acequias to our communities and our future by empowering acequias with the appropriate resources to build upon their traditional knowledge to adapt and survive in changing economic, environmental, and sociopolitical conditions.

Acequias are unique as cultural institutions as well as local governments in New Mexico. Despite pre-dating statehood by hundreds of years, it was not until the late 20th century that the current statewide organizations, NMAC and NMAA, were established by acequia leaders for the purposes of acequia advocacy. While the two groups share common goals and they originated in the same relative timeframe of the late 1980s, NMAC and NMAA originated as distinct entities to address different needs for acequias and acequia communities.

NMAC + NMAA: Distinct Histories and Complementary Roles

New Mexico Acequia Commission (NMAC, or “Commission”) is a Governor-appointed body inside state government whose role is to advise the Governor and Legislature on acequia-related policy matters. It is composed of 10 members serving staggered terms and funded solely by a recurring line item in the state budget. NMAC has an integral role in advising state and federal agencies on infrastructure needs and priorities. NMAC was also given a key role in serving on the committee that allocates funding for acequias going through the adjudication process. In addition, NMAC serves a vital role as a point of reference in state government for communication between acequias and state and federal agencies. One of the critical roles that NMAC plays is to submit letters to the Governor on a variety of policy matters. This is often done in coordination with NMAA as part of legislative advocacy and supporting legislation that is beneficial to acequias. NMAC was also recently engaged in commenting on agency rulemaking related to regional water planning. Since NMAC was codified in statute in 1993, the law has not been updated to reflect the changing needs and realities of acequias. Further, NMAC has had a flat budget for over 15 years. Strategic updates to the statute could enable NMAC to serve its function more effectively while expanding its role to better serve growing acequia needs.

New Mexico Acequia Association is a membership-based, statewide grassroots organization focused on advocacy, education and technical assistance for acequias and protecting water as a community resource. NMAA has hundreds of individual acequia members in addition to over twenty regional delegations that compose the Congreso de las Acequias, NMAA’s governing body. NMAA is supported by a diverse set of funding sources including grants, donations, and contracts. NMAA was established in 1989 with the mission of “protecting water and acequias, growing healthy food for our families and communities, and honoring our cultural heritage.” NMAA has played a key role in acequia policy advocacy and has led several major policy reforms that have served the evolving needs of acequias over the past 30 years. These include major legislation strengthening acequia decision-making over water rights, improving statutory language regarding easements and enforcement, improving transparency in water transfers, and establishing an acequia infrastructure program with recurring funding. NMAA has served hundreds of acequias statewide, has a robust technical assistance program, and has developed unique experience and expertise on acequia governance, infrastructure, and disaster recovery. The need for NMAA’s services has grown significantly, and continuity and additional capacity are needed to keep pace in providing technical assistance services to acequias.

While our two organizations coordinate closely and regularly, with several leaders serving on both the Commission and NMAA Board, there have been questions in the past regarding the organizations’ respective roles, what funds support which efforts, and whether and how coordination has occurred between the two. The shared vision in this document, based on our decades of experience and over 30 years working together, explicitly advances a set of shared policy priorities to address the urgent and changing needs of acequias while ensuring our two

organizations are positioned in complementary, effective, and strategic ways to serve and protect New Mexico's acequias into the future.

Growing Challenges Facing Acequias

There are an estimated 700 acequias in New Mexico that continue their vital role as local democratic institutions managing water in their respective communities. While acequias have centuries-old customs and traditions, they have also been integrated into New Mexico's modern governmental framework as "political subdivisions of the state." For acequias, this recognition as local institutions of government is a source of both opportunities and challenges. For instance, acequias have significant powers over water management at the local level and are eligible for state funding for capital improvement projects and disaster recovery resources. They are also required to have bylaws and comply with the Open Meetings Act, Audit Act, and similar statutes and regulations that require transparency in decision-making and financial reporting.

The challenges and threats facing acequias have grown over the past 30 years. Acequias and community ditches operate in an increasingly challenging landscape related to water supply and water rights. There has never been a greater need for acequias to have reliable, expert technical advice in sensitive matters to protect acequia-based water rights. As climate change intensifies, acequias also need support and advocacy with regard to water shortages as well as wildfire and flood disasters with increasing frequency and intensity. Acequias have unique infrastructure planning needs, beyond physical infrastructure design and construction, including the capacity and training to effectively participate in infrastructure and disaster recovery programs. These challenges and needs require an integrated approach, allowing NMAC and NMAA to serve in complementary roles that are institutionalized and appropriately resourced.

Acequias and community ditches are facing unprecedented threats to their survival due to conditions affecting water rights, water supply, climate and disasters, and water quality:

- **Water transfers are an existential threat.** New Mexico is a water-short state, and water rights are generally over-appropriated. Acequias and community ditches are vulnerable to water transfers that move water out of traditional uses to industrial and commercial uses. Acequias and community ditches were authorized in state law in 2003 to have decision-making power over water applications based on a determination of whether a specific application could be detrimental to the acequia or its members. To effectively implement that decision-making authority, acequias and community ditches need technical assistance that is uniquely tailored to help them with appropriate bylaws and careful implementation of their bylaws and decision-making process.
- **Megadrought and climate change are causing severe water shortages.** For decades, acequias and community ditches have struggled with every intensifying drought and water shortage. Acequias are using their expertise and traditional knowledge to address shortages, but they also need advocacy and support to respond to water scarcity, including through management tools, data, and technical support.
- **Disasters, wildfires, and post-fire flooding threaten acequias' survival.** Climate change has exacerbated extreme weather in New Mexico. Since 2022, acequias have been besieged by the largest wildfires in state history. Cumulatively, between 150 and 200 acequias have been significantly damaged by post-fire and flash flooding. Acequias and community ditches require specialized technical assistance in disaster recovery

efforts due to the complexity of disaster assistance programs. Generally, disaster programs through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) are not well tailored to meet the needs of acequias, and special efforts and collaboration are needed to effectively respond to acequia needs.

- **Water quality is at risk from industrial and commercial activities** such as mining, weapons production by national laboratories, and other uses, as well as post-fire heavy metal contamination. Acequias are often downstream of existing or proposed industrial developments, including recently proposed uranium and heavy metal mining. Evidence suggests that communities in a burn scar have elevated levels of heavy metals. Affected communities need education and outreach to understand the risks. Also, acequias are increasingly called upon to comment on plans and permits regarding new development. This requires expertise on the regulatory framework and methods for providing input.

Need for Acequia Advocacy, Education, and Assistance

While an important purpose explicitly outlined in the NMAC statute is to advise on policy, the NMAC has not had staffing necessary to meet that mandate. NMAA has developed a program dedicated to policy advocacy and has been the driver of policy reforms for acequias for over three decades. While both entities have valuable expertise on acequias and policies affecting acequias, NMAA has been better resourced, due to private fundraising, to serve the purpose of policy analysis and development. Furthermore, NMAA is often sought out for information and expertise, and in recent years, it has become increasingly necessary for NMAA to be an informational resource to federal and state agencies on a variety of policy and legal matters.

The leadership of both entities agree that some of these basic services and governmental coordination could be provided by NMAC and NMAA collaboratively, with NMAC playing a larger role than its current resources allow. Strengthening NMAC in this role would reduce the workload on NMAA while elevating the importance of NMAC as a vital resource in state government. It would also ensure both continuity and standardization of information and methods. The following are areas in which acequias require coordination at the state level:

- **Informational resource for state agencies regarding acequias.** Acequias and community ditches are unique in New Mexico as cultural institutions and local units of government. Often local, state, or federal agencies have questions about acequias in relation to water management, easements, location, customary practices, operations and otherwise. With adequate resources, NMAC could be a source of information to respond to agency requests for information. NMAA could collaborate as a subject-matter expert to build capacity at NMAC, e.g., creating tools such as a resource guide or resource library.
- **Regional Water Planning.** The State Legislature passed the Water Security Planning Act (WSPA) in 2023. The statute and rules promulgated by the Interstate Stream Commission explicitly recognize a role for acequias and community ditches. Specifically, regional acequia associations have representation on regional planning councils. In the guidelines to implement the WSPA, ISC included NMAC as the official entity to consult and advise on the regional water planning process. Significant effort and resources will be needed to conduct education and outreach to acequias to prepare them to effectively engage in regional water planning. NMAA and NMAC plan to collaborate on this effort, but NMAC will need staff resources to make this joint undertaking viable.

- **Agency Rulemaking.** Acequias are potentially affected by a wide array of agency policy-making. At the state level, this includes water planning, audit rule implementation, surface water permitting, and others. At the federal level, this includes commenting on federal agency rulemaking and agency management plans, such as U.S. Forest Service Forest Management Plans. NMAA has extensive experience submitting comments on agency rulemaking, including providing expert testimony. While this role can continue, it is vital that the NMAC have an official role in reviewing proposed rules and developing policy positions. NMAA can provide subject-matter expertise to build more capacity at NMAC to serve this purpose, but NMAC will need resources to hire and train new staff.
- **Policy Development and Recommendations.** Acequias have much at stake in the state legislative process. NMAC is mandated by statute to serve as an advisor to the State Legislature and Governor. To serve this purpose, NMAC needs greater capacity to prepare bill analysis upon request by the Legislative Finance Committee in preparation for Fiscal Impact Reports (FIRS), which, in addition to fiscal impacts, document significant policy issues related to legislation. Additionally, NMAC needs more resources to effectively educate policymakers during the legislative interim on topics of importance to acequias. NMAA already has a robust policy advocacy arm and is available to provide subject-matter expertise and support to build NMAC capacity in strengthening its role.

Short-Term Goals: 2027 Session and Fiscal Year

The current configuration of support for acequias, through NMAC, NMAA and ACDEP in particular, is being outpaced by the challenges detailed above. The key gaps we propose to begin addressing – in terms of structure and capacity – are outlined in greater detail below.

Current Structure and Capacity in Need of Updating

New Mexico Acequia Commission is composed of experienced leaders with vast institutional knowledge and cultural competency about acequias. However, NMAC significantly lacks the staff and capacity to perform its duties as defined in the decades-old statute, which charges the Commission with:

- Providing policy analysis and recommendations to the Governor and state bodies
- Effectively facilitating communications between acequias and state and federal agencies
- Acting as an interagency liaison

NMAC's budget has been \$88,100 for well over a decade. This enables the Commission to hold regular monthly meetings, which are generally hybrid. However, it has been insufficient to fulfill the full array of responsibilities under the statute – i.e., participating fully in analyzing and making recommendations on water policy to relevant state and federal bodies; participating in regional water planning efforts; or reviewing and commenting on legislation affecting acequias.

In addition to its current statutory role, NMAC and NMAA leaders have identified the need for NMAC to play a stronger advisory role with regard to infrastructure funding and other programmatic funding. For example, the statute directs NMAC to advise on acequia rehabilitation priorities. Since the codification of NMAC, the funding programs for acequias have grown more diversified and complex, including a more prominent role of the ACDIF program at the ISC. In addition, the statute for the Acequia and Community Ditch Fund (ACDF) identifies a representative of the NMAC as a member of the committee that makes funding decisions.

New Mexico Acequia Association is an accomplished and well-respected non-profit organization in New Mexico with a successful track record of advocacy, in addition to having a robust technical assistance program funded by a variety of sources. However, as acequia needs have evolved and increased, the extent and complexity of acequia technical assistance requests is exceeding current capacity. NMAA's annual budget is approximately \$2 million and includes the following programs:

- **Acequia Assistance Program.** This program includes two project teams: the Acequia Governance Team and the Infrastructure and Disaster Recovery Team. NMAA has provided technical assistance to acequias for close to 30 years on a range of topics. This direct technical assistance includes water rights and water management, acequia bylaws and other governance matters, infrastructure planning and funding applications, eligibility requirements for funding programs, navigation of federal and state agency requirements, disaster recovery, and other topics. NMAA also has a Legal Services Project staffed with an attorney and additional contract attorneys, including New Mexico Legal Aid, and coordinates closely with the NM Department of Justice (NMDOJ) Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Division. NMAA has served over 500 acequias in the past 30 years.

The technical assistance needs of acequias have grown increasingly complex over the years. Due to water scarcity and mounting demands for water, acequias are often in the position of defending their water rights from new development and making decisions about water rights and water allocations. More acequias are seeking funding for infrastructure, requiring them to update their organizational documents and financial compliance. Disasters, specifically burn scar and flash flooding, have increased in frequency and intensity, straining local resources and the technical assistance resources available to acequias from NMAA, agencies, and other partners.

- **Community and Youth Education.** NMAA provides comprehensive education and outreach to acequias, communities and youth. As a complement to the assistance program, the education program includes workshops and training for local acequia officials on governance, water management, and infrastructure. NMAA's education and outreach includes farmer training and workshops on best practices for farming and ranching, in addition to funding programs through state and federal agencies. NMAA's youth education program includes a leadership institute and conservation corps. All of this programming has significant potential for growth and could be expanded to have a more methodical approach for greater impact – e.g., formalizing educational programming and structures for adult popular education and youth education through curriculum development and partnerships with educational institutions.
- **Policy Advocacy.** Acequias and community ditches are diverse in terms of geography, customary practices, and the unique challenges related to each watershed or basin. NMAA has developed a statewide network of leaders over the past three decades with training and informational resources on policy issues facing acequias. This network is the foundation of NMAA's policy development work. This grassroots engagement, combined with NMAA's seasoned expertise, has resulted in several policy reforms regarding water rights, infrastructure funding and governance. These have included significant changes in statute to protect acequia-based water rights (2003 water transfer and water banking legislation); strengthen language around easements and enforcement powers; improve transparency by requiring online publication of OSE water applications; support financial compliance with funding for OSA small political subdivisions; and several other initiatives. NMAA was instrumental in creating the Acequia and Community

Ditch Infrastructure Fund (ACDIF) in statute while also supporting long-term solvency of the Irrigation Works Construction Fund. This coincided with a successful effort to create a fully staffed Acequia Bureau at the ISC. Recently, NMAA was part of a collaborative effort to advocate for creating a surface water quality permitting program at NMED.

The Acequia and Community Ditch Education Program (ACDEP) has its origins in the advocacy of acequia leaders in the early 2000s. After the State Legislature passed a bill in 2003 ([SB 123](#) - Senator Carlos Cisneros, House Speaker Ben Lujan) granting acequias certain powers over water rights, funding was made available through DFA to contract with NMAA to conduct education and outreach to acequias to update their bylaws. This funding was institutionalized as the ACDEP in 2007, when a recurring line item was added to the budget for DFA's Local Government Division. Hundreds of acequias updated their bylaws to incorporate the authority granted to them regarding water transfers and water banking. This was a historic achievement for acequia leaders. Subsequently, technical assistance for infrastructure planning, specifically preparation of ICIPs and Capital Outlay requests, became an integral part of the program.

The ACDEP has represented a long-standing partnership between NMAA, NMAC, and DFA. In addition to providing direct assistance to acequias, NMAA built a program with specialized expertise on acequia water issues and infrastructure needs. Since this was added to the state budget as a recurring line item, NMAA has been the recipient of a contract for professional services, which was awarded through a competitive procurement process, to carry out the purposes of the ACDEP.

While not codified in law, the title of the ACDEP suggests the line item was intended to ensure resources were directed toward "acequia education." The program was helpful in strengthening collaboration between NMAA and NMAC, as the contractual agreement generally required regular reporting and communication from NMAA to NMAC at monthly meetings. For several years, NMAA has provided a monthly written report to NMAC. Overall, the ACDEP has served a vital function in meeting the educational and technical assistance needs of acequias.

Despite the ACDEP's significant role for acequias statewide, its structure has left uncertainty and unpredictability from year to year, in part due to turnover at DFA and a lack of institutional memory about the purpose of the appropriation. The ACDEP is in significant need of being institutionalized in state government to meet the extensive need and provide acequias with predictable, reliable services. A combination of customary practice and state law, acequia governance is unique and unlike any other type of local government. Services for acequias must be uniquely tailored to their needs and should give special consideration to the role of volunteers in acequia governance, management, and operations. NMAC, with commissioners representing acequia interests and bringing expertise from around the state, is well positioned to understand acequias' unique needs and idiosyncrasies. Currently, however, NMAC lacks a meaningful role in implementing the ACDEP. Further, while many current governance needs are being met by the ACDEP, acequias' needs are rapidly exceeding the available resources.

Proposal for 2027 Budget and Legislative Session

To address the challenges and gaps described above, NMAC and NMAA jointly advocate the following three budget and statutory changes:

1. Increase NMAC budget to \$405,500 to fulfill NMAC's current statutory mandates in the manner outlined below.

2. Make clarifications to the NMAC statute to better enable NMAC to fulfill and explain its current functions.
3. Codify the ACDEP in such a way that it is administratively attached to the NMAC.
4. Add language to the NMAC statute enabling the Commission to play a substantive role in administering the ACDEP.

Each of the above proposed changes are described in more detail below.

I. Increase NMAC budget to \$405,500 to fulfill NMAC's statutory mandate and increase its capacity to advise on funding recommendations as outlined in Section IV below.

NMAC and NMAA propose increasing the budget to staff NMAC with 2.0 FTE plus additional contractual work and operational expenses. This increased capacity would ensure adequate staffing for NMAC to advise the State Legislature and Governor on policies affecting acequias, facilitate and improve both communication and service delivery to acequias, and serve as a liaison to state and federal agencies. This would help serve NMAC's basic statutory purpose while also accommodating some incremental changes proposed in this report, including involvement in the ACDEP as outlined below. Future staffing would build upon this baseline, potentially adding staff with more expertise on policy analysis as well as providing direct technical assistance services to acequias. The proposed NMAC budget is attached as an Appendix to this document.

The proposed increase will enable NMAC to fulfill the **programmatic objectives** stated below.

1. Provide policy recommendations to the Governor and State Legislature by coordinating input from acequias, stakeholders, and state agencies.
 - a. Develop and present 1-2 policy presentations during the legislative interim in coordination with NMAA and agency partners.
 - b. Develop policy and budget recommendations submitted annually to the Legislature and Governor.
2. Provide advice and recommendations on infrastructure funding by offering input to state and federal agencies regarding funding priorities that meet acequias' needs statewide.
 - a. Convene bi-annual meetings where funding agencies (e.g., ISC, USACE, NRCS) present their funding opportunities and provide data on the outcomes of their respective programs.
 - b. Provide input to funding agencies on their policies regarding funding priorities and application processes to ensure access and effectiveness for participating acequias. Prepare a white paper each year with analysis and recommendations to funding agencies.
3. Serve as a resource to acequias and community ditches by connecting them with educational, funding and technical assistance resources.
 - a. Provide subject matter expertise and recommendations to DFA on the administration of the ACDEP by providing input on the Scope of Work and the procurement process. Create a process to participate in developing the Scope of Work and build capacity in such a manner that NMAC can participate in the selection of qualified contractors. (Note: this would require a change to the ACDEP, as proposed further below.)
 - b. Develop a resource guide for acequias and community ditches that explains government agencies and their roles in supporting acequias.

- c. Serve as a liaison between state government and acequias by referring those requesting assistance to the appropriate agency or non-profit partners.
- 4. Assist state government agencies, the State Legislature and the Governor by ensuring appropriate acequia representation in key policymaking bodies.
 - a. Participate in implementation of the Water Security Planning Act (WSPA) by fulfilling the role outlined in the draft WSPA guidelines developed by the ISC. The draft language includes NMAC as a key advisory body with regard to the policy needs and interests of acequias in regional water planning.
 - b. Play a more robust role on the ACDF Committee, which is a statutory requirement in Section 73-2A-3. Ensure the NMAC representative is prepared and informed to advise on funding priorities by preparing a report with analysis and funding recommendations independent of OSE recommendations.
 - c. Participate in committees, task forces, and similar initiatives at the request of state agencies such as ISC, OSA, DHSEM, and others as needed.

II. Clarify the NMAC statute to enable NMAC to fulfill and explain its current functions.

NMAA and NMAC propose making incremental changes to the NMAC statute for the sake of clarity and coherence, as the statute has not been updated since it was created decades ago. Editing the statutory language would help NMAC explain its function and enable others to better understand the functions it serves. Minor statutory edits would be useful in clarifying NMAC's role as official liaison with state and federal agencies and acequia policy advisory body in state government. A specific change that is needed is to authorize the NMAC to hire staff to fulfill its role as an advisory body and enable it to provide technical assistance to acequias. In addition to fulfilling its advisory role and expand its role in assisting acequias, a baseline staffing pattern will enable NMAC to start building more capacity to meet the evolving needs of acequias in future years. The New Mexico Land Grant Council could be a model for this type of future capacity-building involving programs and staff.

III. Codify the ACDEP to ensure reliability and protection of the program and to address the unmet needs of acequias.

We propose creating and codifying the ACDEP fund in statute to formalize the program and define its purpose, in alignment with its historic role and the original legislative intent, and administratively attaching it to the NMAC in a manner that provides the NMAC with a meaningful role in its administration and allocation. Without being codified, the funds are subject to uncertainty and unpredictability, and acequias remain vulnerable to changing administrations.

The ACDEP is the only resource in the state budget that is directed toward serving the needs of acequias in building their capacity as political subdivisions of the state. During the past 20-plus years, the fund has been used primarily to support acequia governance, water rights and water management, and infrastructure planning. NMAA has built capacity by developing a team of experts through training and on-the-ground experience. Regardless of which entity provides services in the future, there is a need to ensure that the fund is well-defined in statute to align with acequia needs as determined by subject-matter experts. NMAC and NMAA are committed to ensuring these funds continue to be directed to acequias, ideally with input and advice from an entity with acequia expertise on how the services are scoped, awarded and allocated.

We propose that the ACDEP be codified in a manner similar to the Civil Legal Services Fund, in which the Civil Legal Services Commission plays a role in the fund allocation. This would also allow a percentage of the fund to be used by DFA to administer the program.

IV. Define a role for the NMAC in the scoping and awarding of ACDEP funds.

In addition to institutionalizing the ACDEP, we propose that the NMAC have a meaningful role in defining the scope of the program and in allocation of funding. It is crucial that an entity with institutional knowledge and expertise play a role in its administration, and specifically in developing a scope of services and selecting contractors with the appropriate capacity and expertise to fulfill the contracts for services. This requires a strong understanding of acequias' diverse needs throughout the state and the strategic value that particular contractors can provide to meet those needs. NMAC is composed of acequia leaders from various regions of the state who understand the many issues facing their communities and have the expertise to help select service providers best suited to these diverse needs. NMAA and NMAC strongly support NMAC serving in such a role.

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

NMAC and NMAA leadership are committed to building capacity in our respective organizations to serve the complex needs of acequias with expertise, advocacy, and resources for education and technical assistance. Through this collaborative effort, we propose to build on our strengths by creating a state-funded support system for acequias and community ditches statewide.

A robust support system would include a well-resourced NMAC with staff to provide policy recommendations to the Governor and State Legislature, advocate for acequias and community ditches with state and federal agencies, and serve as an informational and educational resource to acequias. This role would be complemented with strong and independent representation, advocacy, education, and assistance from NMAA and its member regional acequia associations.

Specifically, this proposal seeks to establish a baseline of staffing support for the NMAC with an increase in budget from \$88,000 to \$405,500 to support NMAC with two full-time staff persons, as well as operational and contractual assistance. This proposal also seeks to bring stability and continuity to educational and technical assistance resources for acequias by codifying ACDEP in state law. Administratively attaching the fund to NMAC would enable NMAC to have a meaningful role in developing the scope of services and allocating the funding.

With an appropriate level of funding support, NMAC and NMAA would be empowered to serve strategic and complementary roles, with NMAC effectively able to serve as an institutional policy body and oversee the educational and technical assistance funding for acequias, and NMAA able to leverage additional resources to advance community and youth education and broader advocacy on behalf of acequias and acequia communities. This model would draw on the decades of experience that are currently embodied NMAA and NMAC and ensure the two institutions are supported for their continued service to acequias in the years to come.

Appendix A: Proposed NMAC Budget (FY 2028)

Proposed Budget Expenditures		Proposed Roles/Tasks	
Personnel			
DFA/ NMAC Staff Director & Fringe Benefits (\$100,000 w 30% Fringe)	1.0 FTE	The Director will be responsible for the following: *Stakeholder Engagement: Act as the primary liaison between the Commission, local, state, and federal entities, and acequia communities to advance Commission goals. *Strategic Leadership: Collaborate with the Commission to establish strategic direction and represent the organization at key legislative and stakeholder meetings. *Operational Management: Oversee staff, manage budgets, and direct organizational resources.	\$ 130,000
DFA/ NMAC Management Analyst & Fringe Benefits (\$85,000 w 30% Fringe)	1.0 FTE	*The Management Analyst (MA) supports the Commission and Director by overseeing daily operations of the Commission. *The MA will work with the Director to implement the strategic plan to ensure maximum organizational efficiency. *Additionally, the MA will be act as a vital link between upper management and team members, and will assist in preparing deep analysis of legislative bills and policy affecting the Commission and acequia communities. *The position will also be responsible for handling logistics and administrative tasks to allow the director to focus on broader, high-level decisions.	\$ 110,500
Total Personnel			\$ 240,500
Other NMAC Expenses			
In State Travel/Per diem		The travel budget supports essential meeting and travel expenses for the 11-member Commission and its staff. While the Commission regularly convenes for monthly meetings in Santa Fe, an increase in travel funding is requested to cover expanded official duties. Commissioners and staff must routinely represent acequia interests at legislative committee hearings, regional water planning sessions, and interagency meetings with the Office of the State Engineer (OSE), the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC), and other state and federal entities.	\$ 30,000
Office Supplies		Upon approval of the new staffing positions, funding will be required for	\$ 5,000

	standard operational supplies. This includes technology, office furniture, writing materials, filing systems, and mailing resources to support daily workflows for both staff and commissioners.	
Computers & Equipment	Funding will cover purchase of two computers, printers, and essential office hardware necessary to equip staff and ensure continuous operational support for the Commission.	\$ 10,000
Office Rent	NMAC currently lacks a dedicated physical office. Funding for an official administrative facility will provide essential operational space for staff and commissioners, centralizing daily activities and enhancing organizational efficiency.	\$ 20,000
Contracts - Acequia related Initiatives	Contractual services will provide specialized expertise to support a smooth transition from contract personnel to permanent staff. Additionally, these funds will secure technical subject-matter expertise in water management, disaster relief, and other specialized services critical to advancing the Commission's mission.	\$ 90,000
Miscellaneous Expenditures	Contractual services currently absorb operational expenses, including web hosting, electronic signature software, and Zoom video conferencing licenses. In addition, contractors cover indirect costs such as printing and miscellaneous administrative expenses required for daily Commission operations.	\$ 10,000
Total NMAC Other Expenses		\$ 165,000
Total NMAC Budget Request		\$ 405,500

Additional Notes

- NMAC's base budget is currently \$88,100 and has not been increased in 15+ years.
- For FY 27, NMAC received a special appropriation of \$100,000, bringing the total 1-year budget to \$188,100.
- The proposed FY 28 Budget request allows NMAC to meet the statutory requirements of the NMAC Legislation.