

New Mexico Veteran Chamber of Commerce

Briefing to the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee

October 16, 2026 | CNM Smith Brasher Hall, Room 209 | Albuquerque, New Mexico

Advocacy
Mentorship
Leadership

Veteran-Owned
Small Business
Statewide Impact

WEEBB
Framework

Presented by John Garcia, Chris Sweetin, and Cornelius Smith

What NMVCC is building

Purpose of today's briefing

Mission

Empower New Mexico's veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs to achieve lasting business success and economic independence through advocacy, mentorship, and leadership.

Vision

A thriving, inclusive network where veteran and military spouse business leaders drive New Mexico's growth, create opportunity, inspire leadership, and leave a legacy of service beyond the uniform.

Why it matters

Veterans and military spouses already contribute to New Mexico's economy. The state now needs a coordinated chamber structure to turn that service, experience, and business ownership into statewide growth.

The veteran economy is already here

New Mexico data points



124,000+

veterans live in New Mexico



Nearly 13,000

veteran-owned small businesses



38%

of NM veterans live with a service-connected disability

The gap: veteran entrepreneurs report barriers in capital, procurement, certification, mentorship, and business development programs outside Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Our operating framework: WEEBB

A statewide approach to veteran stability and growth



Wellness

Mental health,
reintegration, peer
programs, and family
stability



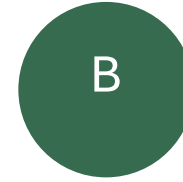
Education

GI Bill navigation, training,
certifications, and skill
translation



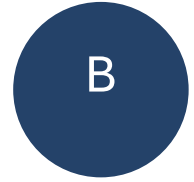
Employment

Veteran employment,
SkillBridge, and hiring
partnerships



Benefits

Filing
assistance and
connection to
earned
resources



Business

Procurement
pathways,
capital access,
mentorship,
and advocacy

Year 1 strategic priorities

Where the Chamber is focused



Certification workshops

One per quarter to help businesses understand state and federal requirements.



Procurement Expo & Summit

A statewide event to connect veteran businesses with buyers, employers, and resource partners.



Legislative advocacy

Contracting pathways, set-aside policy, and supplier diversity support.



Veteran business directory

A statewide directory to make veteran-owned businesses visible to public and private buyers.

Legislative takeaway: NMVCC is not asking the state to create demand. The demand already exists. We are asking for support to organize, connect, and scale the response.

Pressing issues we see

What veteran business owners keep running into

Capital

Limited access to startup and growth financing; difficulty matching business stage to the right capital source.

Procurement

Businesses do not know where to find opportunities or how to become procurement ready.

Certification

SDVOSB/VOSB and state certification processes can be confusing and fragmented.

Rural reach

Business and benefits programs are harder to access outside Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Workforce

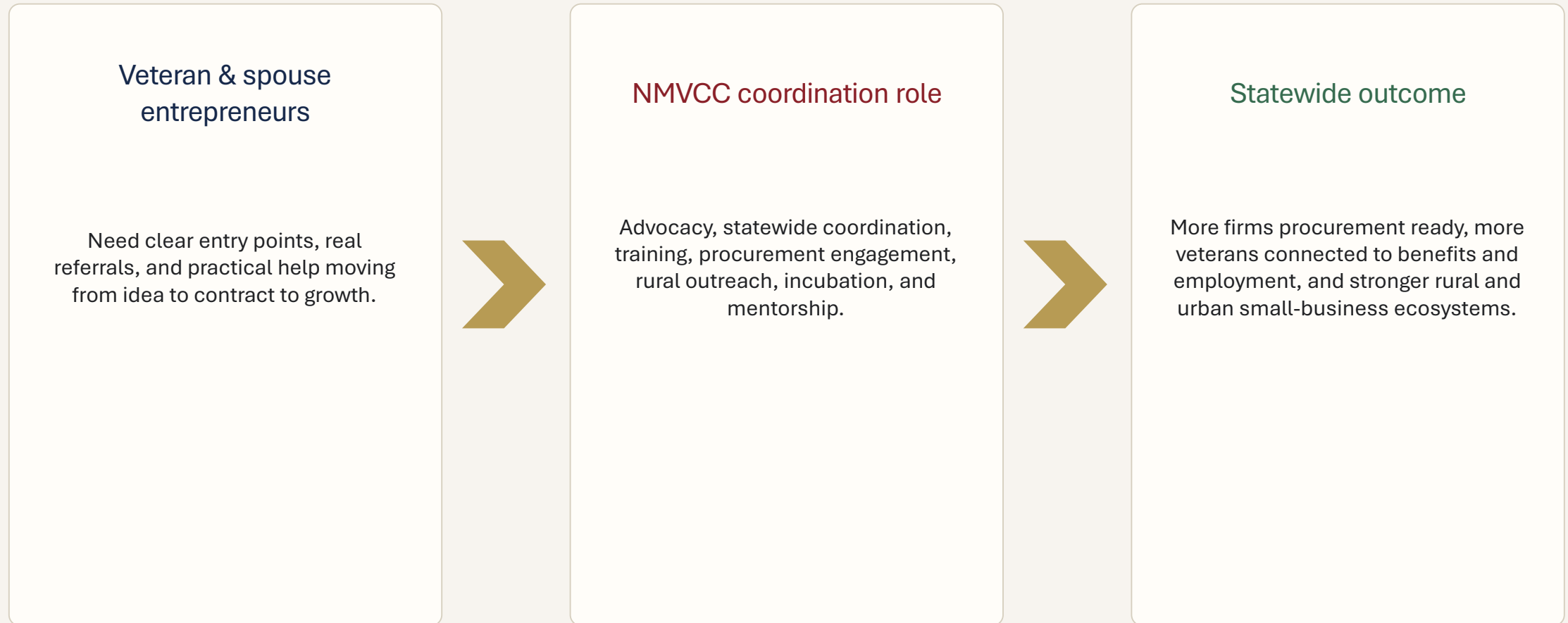
Veterans bring strong technical and leadership skills, but employers need better pipelines.

Mentorship

Veteran founders need peer guidance, industry introductions, and practical support beyond startup classes.

Why statewide coordination matters

The Chamber can connect programs that already exist



Where the Legislature can help

Legislation, funding, support

1. Fund statewide capacity

Support operating capacity for a small statewide chamber infrastructure: outreach, convening, directory management, training coordination, and rural support.

2. Strengthen procurement pathways

Support legislation or study work that improves veteran-owned business participation in state and local procurement.

3. Build interagency coordination

Build on current MOUs with SBDC, BBB, WESST, Black Chamber, and Rio Rancho Regional Chamber; use those partners to create a consistent referral and support model.

4. Support rural outreach

Enable business clinics and certification workshops in rural counties and underserved veteran communities.

The state does not need to replace existing resources. It can help connect them, measure them, and make them reachable for veteran-owned businesses statewide.

Current progress and next-stage scale

Approaching year two with
statewide momentum



NMVCC has progressed from organizational launch to an active, multi-region programming platform ready for statewide scale.

What we are trying to build

1. Grow membership and services for veteran and military spouse-owned businesses.
2. Expand rural outreach, resource navigation, and partner referrals statewide.
3. Build the staffing, systems, and reporting capacity needed to support measurable outcomes.

Where support is needed

Unlike a city chamber, NMVCC does not have a municipal funding base. Today, the Chamber is supported primarily through membership, sponsorships, and event support.

Sustainable financing would help us scale outreach, maintain programming, support VETBIZ, and report back with clear outcomes for veteran-owned businesses across New Mexico.

Thank you. Questions?