

# Nurturing young children's curiosity about the universe

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Over the coming year four Rio Arriba libraries— El Pueblo de Abiquiu Library, El Rito Public Library, Embudo Valley Library and Truchas Public Library—plan to begin or expand their participation in New Mexico's STEM to Read initiative, which focuses on teaching young children up to age 5 foundational STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) concepts through singing, talking, reading, writing and playing. Helping the youngsters develop emotional literacy skills like self-regulation, turn-taking, listening and following directions is another key component in establishing a strong foundation for later STEM literacy success.

All four libraries are located in unincorporated villages and as such are not financed through tax dollars. Instead, the libraries depend on raising funds from foundations and local donors, including United Way of Northern New Mexico (UWNNM), which supports STEM education efforts in partnership with Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The UWNM contributions will be leveraged with funding from the New Mexico State Library and the New Mexico Library Foundation, institutions that have been at the center of promoting and supporting the STEM to Read program in a growing number of libraries across the state.

The state-wide STEM to Read project kicked off with professional development for library and museum staff in November 2013 by sharing strategies for bringing STEM topics to story times and other library programs, for modeling to parents how to turn any story or occasion into a teachable STEM moment and for creating hands-on play-and-learn environments that engage even the youngest learners.

“Each of the four independent Rio Arriba libraries will deepen their involvement with the STEM to Read initiative at their own pace,” said Kristy Ortega, UWNM’s Executive Director. “The El Pueblo de Abiquiu Library, for example, will begin with a pilot STEM to READ program, while the Embudo Valley Library, which already offers a weekly STEM to Read story time, will build on its current success.”

For Ortega, early literacy, including early STEM literacy, is a logical place to start in attempting to reverse New Mexico’s poverty statistics and educational challenges. Citing information from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, Ortega noted that “over 60 percent of New Mexico children are not attending pre-school and 22 percent of New Mexico children live in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma. Clearly, we need to expose more children to the wonders of reading and the natural world.”

To learn about United Way of Northern New Mexico, visit the [UWNM](#) website.

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