WOODY AND GAYLE HUNT
FAMILY FOUNDATION

Gift Report 2026

HUNT CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AT ARROWHEAD CENTER

THE HUNT CENTER FOR
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

NM STATE

Overview

The Hunt Center for Entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and business creation across the Borderplex region. By expanding access to entrepreneurship, nurturing student entrepreneurs, and connecting startups to capital, the Hunt Center is helping build a stronger, more connected regional economy. In FY2026, collaboration was at the heart of our work. We expanded programming, deepened cross-border partnerships, and helped students and founders put emerging technologies to work—strengthening pathways from ideas to ventures across the region.



Access to Entrepreneurship



Student Entrepreneurship



Access to Capital

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

A Year of Collaboration and Regional Impact

WOODY AND GAYLE HUNT FAMILY FOUNDATION



"At the Hunt Center for Entrepreneurship, we are proud to champion the spirit of innovation that drives opportunity across the Borderplex and beyond. FY2026 was defined by collaboration. Through new partnerships, expanded accelerators, and shared investment in student and startup success, we strengthened pathways for entrepreneurs across the region. We are deeply grateful to the Woody and Gayle Hunt Family Foundation, whose continued support makes this work possible."

CARLOS MURGUIA | HUNT CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DIRECTOR

FY2026 Impact at a Glance

31+ **Founders and entrepreneurs trained across FY2026 Sprint cohorts**

25% **Efficiency gain reported by a Sprint participant**

Monica Odell, CEO of PXL8, GenAI Product Development Sprint

1ST + 2ND

NMSU team finishes at Desert Dev Lab

Among 27 competing teams

80+ **Students took part in Negotium 2025**

NMSU, UACJ, Tecnológico de Monterrey Campus Ciudad Juárez, and UTEP



55 **Students joined the inaugural Hack NMSU**

From Computer Science, Nursing, Engineering, and Mathematics



9 **FIRE Venture Fellows supported**

From NMSU and UTEP





ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MCA Border Health Innovation Summit 2025

At the Border Health Innovation Summit, the Hunt Center curated and led the "Landscape of Health Innovation" panel, drawing on its network to bring together experts from San Francisco, Phoenix, and Albuquerque, including investors, leaders from Mayo Clinic Ventures, and experienced serial entrepreneurs whose insights were highly relevant to the region. Organized by the Medical Center of the Americas Foundation, the panel underscored the importance of collaboration, investment, talent, and community engagement in advancing health innovation across the Borderplex.



Connecting the Borderplex to national health innovation expertise.



ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Sprints

Through a family of fast-paced, virtual accelerators, founders across New Mexico and the Borderplex put emerging technologies to work in their businesses.

25%
EFFICIENCY GAIN REPORTED BY PARTICIPANT

31+
FOUNDERS / ENTREPRENEURS ACROSS FY2026 COHORTS

GenAI Product Development Sprint	Helped New Mexico and Borderplex startups integrate generative AI into product development. Through hands-on training and mentorship, founders improved product planning and decision-making.
GenAI for Fundraising Excellence Sprint	Equipped 11 regional startups with AI-powered tools to improve investor research, pitch development, and fundraising strategies.
GenAI Systems Builder Sprint	Guided eight entrepreneurs in developing functional AI-powered tools tailored to their business needs, with each completing a working prototype.
Borderplex Fundraising Sprint	Brought together 12 founders from Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, and Las Cruces to strengthen fundraising readiness and cross-border collaboration.



ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Hack Knights

The Hunt Center supported the Hack Knights AI Challenge 2025, **the largest AI-focused hackathon in the Borderplex region**. Held in Ciudad Juárez, the event brought together students and participants from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, showcasing the creativity and technical talent of the region's emerging innovators and strengthening cross-border collaboration across the AI ecosystem.





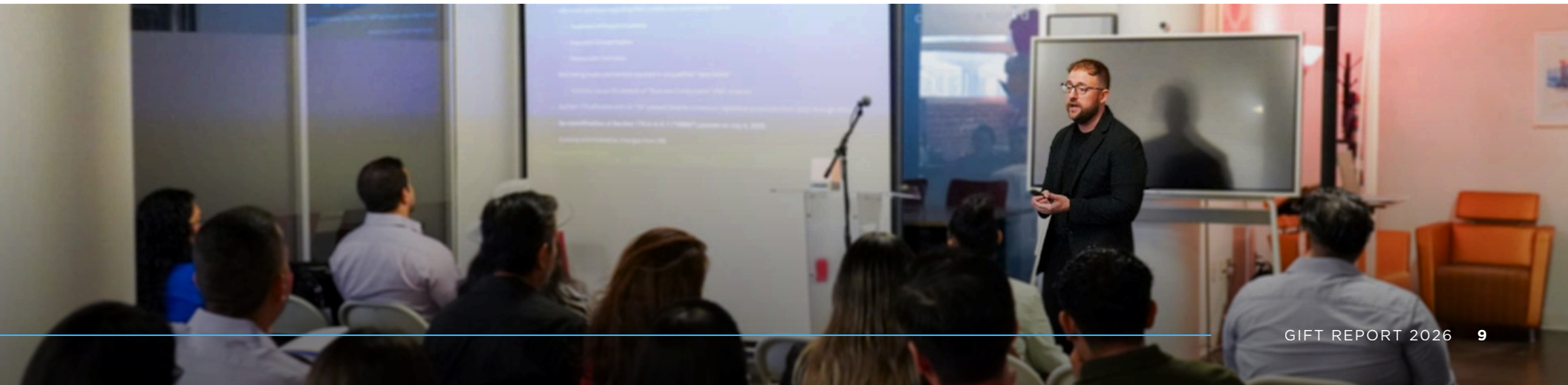
ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

El Paso Startup Week

During El Paso Startup Week, the Hunt Center hosted a session with tax expert Kevin H. Culver, Esq., who shared practical strategies for smart tax planning, helping founders better leverage R&D benefits, conserve resources, and reinvest in growth. Delivered in partnership with Pioneers 21 Business Incubator and Co-Work Space, the session drew strong community participation and engagement.







ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

GCEC 2025

At the 2025 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers Conference in Calgary, the Hunt Center presented "Innovation in the Borderplex Region: Building Inclusive Entrepreneurship Across the United States and Mexico Border," a session highlighting how culture-first, binational programming advances cross-border collaboration.





ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Desert Dev Lab Hackathon

At the 2026 Desert Dev Lab Hackathon, New Mexico's largest software hackathon, two NMSU teams took the top two spots out of 27 competing teams. Hosted by NM Tech Talks in Albuquerque on April 18 and 19 and sponsored by the Hunt Center, the statewide event challenged participants to build working AI solutions for the food and agriculture sector using real datasets. NMSU's Crimson Devs won first place with pantry.ai, an AI-powered application that helps households reduce food waste, and a second NMSU team placed second.

The results highlighted the depth of student talent across NMSU and the wider Borderplex, as well as the kinds of founders and problem solvers driving the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem.







1ST + 2ND PLACE

NMSU Teams | Among 27 competing teams



STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Studio G

Studio G continued to serve as a key pathway for student entrepreneurs, providing mentorship, business development support, and connections to resources across the NMSU entrepreneurial ecosystem. Through the Studio G CEO pathway, students advanced early-stage ideas toward validated ventures and connected to opportunities including Aggie I-Corps, pitch competitions, and other Hunt Center initiatives. In FY2026, Studio G also supported student participation in regional and binational opportunities, helping NMSU entrepreneurs connect with mentors, competitions, and networks across the Borderplex.

424
ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

288
PATHWAY COMPLETERS

187
TRAINING EVENTS

7
ACTIVE SITES



STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Innoventure

Innoventure continued to strengthen its partnership with NMSU TRIO Upward Bound through Camp Innoventure, where students explored entrepreneurship through hands-on learning and innovation. Participants learned the fundamentals of business development, identified real-world problems, and worked in teams to develop solutions aligned with Innoventure's Space, Agriculture, and Energy (SPACE) themes. The camp culminated with student teams presenting their business concepts and prototypes to judges and peers, building skills in critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and entrepreneurship while discovering how innovation can address challenges in their communities and beyond.



Santa Rosa High School's Gold Diggers team presents during the 2026 Innoventure Challenge Finals. Having first competed as middle schoolers, the team has grown its entrepreneurial skills through high school. The 2026 Finals welcomed a record number of high school participants from across New Mexico, in person and virtually.



Amanda Krentz's fourth-grade gifted class won the Innoventure Jr Mascot Naming Contest with "Sparky," the program's lightbulb mascot. Their win earned classroom supplies and helped launch a new chapter of Innoventure Jr, introducing younger students to entrepreneurship through age-appropriate activities.

STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mike Hunt Construction Sprints

In FY2026, the Mike Hunt Construction Sprints expanded entrepreneurship opportunities for NMSU civil engineering students by embedding entrepreneurial thinking across Hunt Center programs, competitions, and industry experiences.

At the 2025 Bold Idea Conference, the initiative supported two engineering-focused sessions led with Chi Epsilon and the Associated General Contractors student chapter. Construction entrepreneurs and industry leaders shared real-world lessons on building companies, leadership, career pathways, and turning technical expertise into business opportunities.





STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Engineers Thinking Like Entrepreneurs

7 HOURS
TO BUILD + DEMO A WORKING PROTOTYPE

1ST PLACE
OPEN INNOVATION CATEGORY

55 STUDENTS
PARTICIPATED IN HACK NMSU





Civil engineering students Nelson Kandel and Samriddhi Ghimire competed as Concrete Coders at the inaugural Hack NMSU. In just seven hours, they built a prototype that uses traffic and weather data to predict highway deterioration and generate plain-language maintenance recommendations.

“That is what happens when engineers think like entrepreneurs.”

STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Negotium (Binational Pitch Competition)

In October 2025, a team of NMSU student entrepreneurs competed at Negotium 2025, a binational business competition held October 3 at the University of Texas at El Paso. Hosted by UTEP's Woody L. Hunt College of Business and Arrowhead Center, in collaboration with the Mike Loya Center for Innovation and Commerce, the event drew more than 80 students from NMSU, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Tecnológico de Monterrey Campus Ciudad Juárez, and UTEP to build products and services that strengthen cross-border trade.

NMSU earned strong results: Hamza Badrari's team UpleX placed third with a cross-border trade and networking app, and Jonathan Bolson contributed to second-place Tripoint Logistics, a new model for cross-border packaging and distribution. Studio G supported the students with mentorship, resources, and cross-border collaboration throughout.



Representing NMSU: Hamza Badrari, Carlos Velasco Aviles, Shashank Dharba, Alexa Naciff, Amber Diaz, Jonathan Bolson, and Olabisi Adebisi.







STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Bold Idea Conference

On October 30, 2025, the Hunt Center for Entrepreneurship, in collaboration with Studio G and the Nusenda FinTech Lab, hosted the Bold Idea Conference at the Corbett Center Student Union. The full-day event brought together industry leaders, faculty experts, and student innovators for keynotes, breakout sessions, and networking centered on practical entrepreneurial skills, from leveraging AI tools and building financial foundations to personal branding and moving from skilled trades into business ownership. The conference was made possible by New Mexico Mutual, the Mike Hunt Construction Sprints, and Nusenda Credit Union.

The day closed with the 2025 Hult Prize Pitch Competition, NMSU's campus qualifier for the national Hult Prize, where student startups presented solutions to societal and economic challenges. Team Hormona, made up of Sydnee Johnson, Alyssa Hernandez, and Melissa Torres, won first place for an at-home hormone tracking concept and earned a spot representing NMSU at the national Hult Prize.

Civil engineering Ph.D. students Samriddhi Ghimire and Rasana Maharjan placed second for Smartcrete, an intelligent, sustainable concrete systems innovation. Beyond the awards, every participating team received a stipend and access to Hunt Center entrepreneurial resources to keep developing their ideas after the competition.



STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Hack NMSU

In April 2026, NMSU marked a milestone in student-led innovation with the inaugural Hack NMSU, an interdisciplinary hackathon held April 10 in Science Hall. Organized by the Computer Science Student Association with support from the NMSU Computer Science Department, the NMSU FinTech Lab powered by Nusenda Credit Union, and the Mike Hunt Construction Sprints, the event brought together 55 students across computer science, nursing, engineering, and mathematics to build and demo a working product in just seven hours.

Civil engineering students Nelson Kandel and Samriddhi Ghimire, competing as Concrete Coders, won the Open Innovation category with a prototype that predicts highway deterioration from real-time traffic and weather data and generates plain-language maintenance recommendations.

Team Hamter took overall first place, addressing a real challenge in nursing practice through collaboration between nursing and computer science students. With strong interest from university leadership, organizers are exploring making Hack NMSU an annual event.

55
STUDENTS

4
DISCIPLINES

7
HOURS TO BUILD + DEMO



STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Bold Idea Challenge

On April 24, 2026, the Nusenda FinTech Lab at Arrowhead Center hosted the Bold Idea Challenge at the Corbett Center Student Union, bringing six finalist teams, selected from a 12-student cohort, to pitch their student-led startups before a panel of expert judges.

Each team had completed the Hunt Center's full entrepreneurship pipeline, advancing through the Studio G CEO pathway and the Aggie I-Corps customer discovery program (including more than 20 customer interviews), and arrived with market-validated ventures spanning energy software, advanced manufacturing, food security, and sustainability.

First place went to Green Audit Pro, an energy audit automation platform by NMSU students Rashed Abuaamoud and Tamer Abuaamoud. Second place went to SCOPE, an AI-driven platform helping researchers secure funding, built by UTEP student Swapnil Samant, reflecting the Hunt Center's growing Borderplex reach. Third place recognized SmartLPBF, a predictive platform for defect-free additive manufacturing by NMSU student Shraddha Bhandari. All placing teams and finalists received cash prizes.







STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Hult Prize

NMSU's Team Hormona took the national stage at the Hult Prize West Nationals in Tucson, Arizona, presenting their venture focused on accessible, at-home hormone health tracking. The multidisciplinary team of Sydnee Johnson, Alyssa Hernandez, and Melissa Torres advanced after winning NMSU's 2025 Hult Prize Pitch Competition, held in the fall as part of the Bold Idea Conference. Often called the "Nobel Prize for students," the Hult Prize challenges university teams to build mission-driven startups aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Supported by Studio G, Hormona held their own against top student entrepreneurs from across the country, gaining feedback from global mentors and valuable national exposure for their venture.

FROM NMSU → NATIONAL STAGE







STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Talent Lab

Through a new partnership with Dangerous Ventures, the Hunt Center is sponsoring two NMSU students for Talent Lab, a six-month fellowship preparing students for venture-ready careers in New Mexico's advanced energy economy. Led by Dangerous Ventures General Partner Ward Hendon, the program combines a mini-MBA curriculum and executive mentorship with a paid startup apprenticeship and Silicon Valley immersion.

[DANGEROUS]





ACCESS TO CAPITAL

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ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Pioneers21 CapitalEdge Accelerator

In collaboration with Pioneers21 and the MCA Foundation, the Center supported the SBA Growth Accelerator Fund Competition Investor Academy, expanding founders' access to investor networks and capital readiness across the Borderplex.





ACCESS TO CAPITAL

FIRE Venture Fellows

The FIRE Venture Fellows program trains Borderplex university students in venture capital fundamentals through hands-on work including drafting investment memos, developing investment theses, and analyzing startups. The 2026 cohort launched in May with nine students from NMSU and UTEP across accounting, finance, computer science, and marketing, led by Daniel Jones, Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Arrowhead Center.

The fellowship expanded access to venture capital education and professional networks for students across the Borderplex, creating a pathway toward future internships and careers in the investment ecosystem.







2026 FIRE Venture Fellows. NMSU: Grace Valentine Olagunju, Dustin Owen Garcia Reyes, Hamza Badrari, Samriddhi Ghimire, Rasana Maharjan, and Kamrul Hassan Suman. UTEP: Carlos Gael Hernandez Castro, Victoria Mascorro, and Diego Hernandez.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Expanding Capital Networks



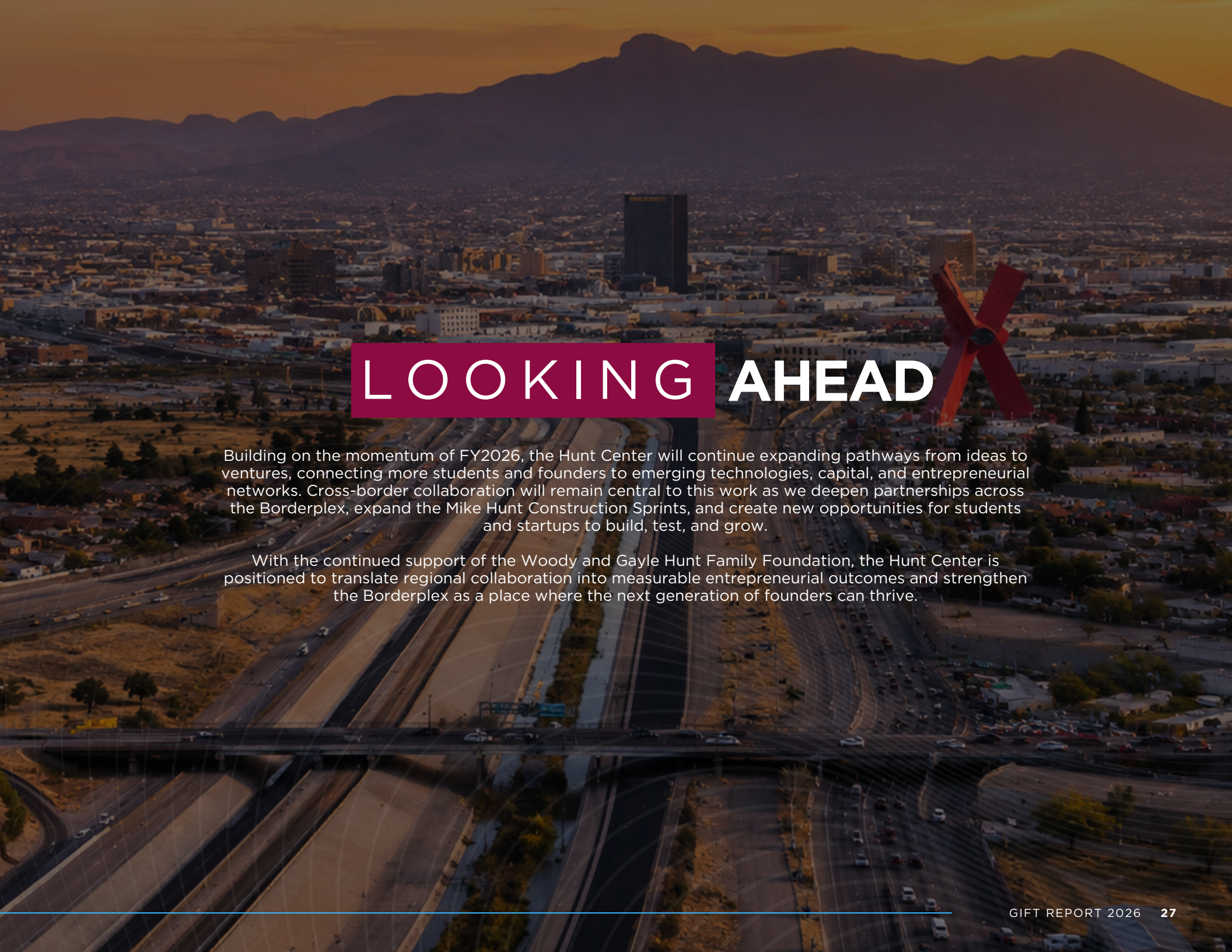
Across New Mexico:
SKI LIFT PITCH COMPETITION

Hunt Center Director Carlos Murguia served as a judge at the Ski Lift Pitch Competition for the fourth consecutive year. Set in Taos against a snow-covered mountain backdrop, the event continues to reflect the steady evolution of New Mexico's entrepreneurial ecosystem, with stronger pitches, new companies stepping up, and founders who arrive increasingly well prepared, all pointing to real, sustained progress across the state.

Across the Global VC Ecosystem:
KAUFFMAN FELLOWS

Through participation in the Kauffman Fellows Program (Class 30), the Hunt Center strengthened its connection to a global venture capital network. During FY2026, Director Carlos Murguia participated in modules in London, San Francisco, and New York focused on fund construction, portfolio strategy, emerging technology trends, and disciplined investment processes. These relationships and insights broaden the networks and investment perspective the Center can bring to founders across the Borderplex and New Mexico.





LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the momentum of FY2026, the Hunt Center will continue expanding pathways from ideas to ventures, connecting more students and founders to emerging technologies, capital, and entrepreneurial networks. Cross-border collaboration will remain central to this work as we deepen partnerships across the Borderplex, expand the Mike Hunt Construction Sprints, and create new opportunities for students and startups to build, test, and grow.

With the continued support of the Woody and Gayle Hunt Family Foundation, the Hunt Center is positioned to translate regional collaboration into measurable entrepreneurial outcomes and strengthen the Borderplex as a place where the next generation of founders can thrive.

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NMSU is an equal opportunity institution.
For disability accommodation, please contact Arrowhead Center.

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