

Application for 2014 ICF Breaking Barriers Award **ICF New Mexico Chapter**

It was a chilly winter day in February 2011, but as usual in New Mexico, the sun was shining brilliantly as a dozen or so dedicated coaches met for an all-day session in a borrowed conference room in Albuquerque. The topic was a serious one: should the ICF chapter in New Mexico, practically moribund, continue to exist?

The chapter in this sparsely-populated but very large state had previously been a thriving concern, but it had fallen on hard times, the way many organizations do at some point in their life cycles. The cadre of perennial volunteers for chapter leadership had gotten tired and even burned out, and no one was showing up for leadership. Volunteer participation was down, membership was dropping, programs were not as frequent or well-attended, and the website was incomplete and outdated. It was going to take a big effort to keep things going, and there didn't seem to be much enthusiasm for that.

The discussion that day focused on what we as coaches wanted most: community. We explored all aspects of that concept, and after hours of both impassioned and practical exploration and debate, we decided that yes, we would rededicate ourselves to creating and sustaining community for coaches in our state. But what would that look like? We considered a wide range of possibilities, even questioning whether we should continue the ICF affiliation. Our conclusion: ICF gave us a strong identity and a stand for professionalism in coaching, and we wanted to make sure we continued to meet the standards for a Charter Chapter. We began to chart our course toward rebirth that day.

Fast forward to spring 2014, three short years later, when, after the annual membership drive, we learned from ICF Global that our chapter was the leader in member retention for North America. Moreover, we had grown our membership significantly, and expanded chapter participation by inaugurating an Associates program that was well-received. We had a beautiful new website in place as well as a strong Facebook community, with our Linked In and Twitter presence also launched. We were providing some ten programs a year, most of them virtual but with at least two live events. Two local community groups were meeting monthly in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Member participation in these events was strong. Our financial state was sound, and we had a revised set of Bylaws and a new elected Board in place to follow on from the more loosely-organized leadership team that got the ball rolling. Best of all, there was a real buzz among the membership that there seemed to be great new energy in the chapter, and people were volunteering for committee assignments and other roles.

We did it — seemingly out of the ashes rose a reinvigorated community of coaches from all around our state, supporting each other and representing the best of professional coaching!

So, how did we do it? Looking back, here's what stands out:

- Leadership: for the first two years, we operated as a real leadership team, with each of us taking on a particular role that mapped loosely to those of Board members, but without that formal designation. This worked well as an interim structure because it enabled us to focus on getting things done while we retooled, and we were able to work in a highly collaborative way without twisting arms to get "officers" in place. ICF Global was willing to work with us during this phase as we revamped the Bylaws and put the

necessary mechanisms in place to ensure our continued status as a Charter Chapter. Even now that we have moved to a formal Board structure, we have preserved our collegial way of working together and consider that one of our chapter's greatest assets.

- Member engagement: early on, we conducted a membership survey to find out about our members, what they valued, and what they might contribute to the community of coaches. We explicitly drew on that to design our offerings and activities, and to stimulate participation. We listened, and they came.
- Strategy: with just three initiatives — develop the chapter, develop the members, develop the marketplace — we have maintained a sharp focus on where we want to go in the future, and a forward-leaning approach.

The real magic, though, was the irresistible pull of community. As coaches, we were never willing to give up that ideal, and today we are thriving together.