

# Colorado COVID-19 Economic Recovery and Resiliency Planning Project

**Project Number: 05-79-06065**

## **Final Report**

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### **Submitted by:**

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### **In Partnership with:**

Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) &  
Community Builders

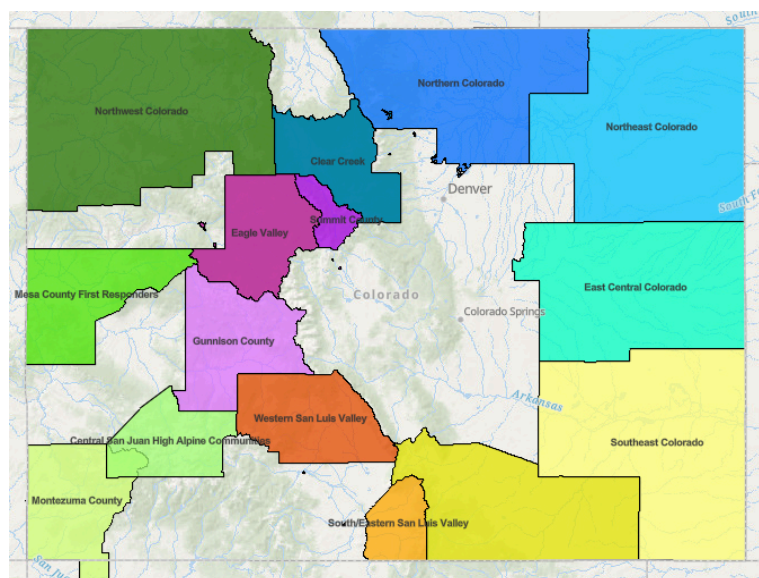
## **Background**

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)-funded “Economic Recovery and Resiliency Planning Project” (henceforth “Resiliency Roadmaps Program”) supported regional economic and community planning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 represents one of the greatest disruptions of our lifetimes, requiring Colorado communities to partner across jurisdictional boundaries in order to effectively respond to change and elevate community assets to solve shared problems.

DOLA provided 16 regional teams representing over 150 rural jurisdictions across Colorado’s rural areas the opportunity to meaningfully partner to support diversifying and strengthening their economies while building their region’s resiliency.

To find out more about each regional focus, to view their Resiliency Roadmap, and implementation efforts, see the [Roadmaps StoryMap](#).

**Figure 1: Map of the 16 Roadmap Regions in Colorado**



## Activities

In mid-2021, DOLA and our partners OEDIT and Community Builders competitively selected each of the 16 regions. Regional teams formation was self-determined, with each region choosing their partners in part based on their “economy-shed” (the region that loosely defines the location of shared businesses, jobs, and workers, as in the economic equivalent of a watershed), local needs and priorities, and willing collaborators.



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### Press Spotlight: Launching the Resiliency Roadmaps Process

[16 Regional Teams Identified for Rural Resiliency and Recovery Roadmaps](#) - a joint Press Release between DOLA and OEDIT (June 10, 2021). This press was also picked up by

- Ark Valley Voice (June 10, 2021). [Rural Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap Program to Benefit 16 Regional Teams](#)
- The Fort Morgan Times (June 14, 2021). [Morgan County team one of 16 regional teams identified for post-COVID recovery assistance](#)

[Colorado Department of Local Affairs Awarded \\$2.3 Million Recovery Assistance Grant](#). Joint Press Release between DOLA and OEDIT (March 16, 2021). Press was also picked up by:

- Colorado Economic Development Council (EDCC). [Program highlights](#)
- The Prowers Journal (March 17, 2021). [DOLA Awarded \\$2.3M Recovery Assistance Grant](#)
- KREX, Grand Junction (July 7, 2021). [CO Rural Resiliency and Recovery Roadmaps](#)
- Aspen Daily News (July 17, 2021). [Region receives tech assistance grant to aid economic recovery](#)

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The 16 Resiliency Roadmap Regional Community Teams were motivated by the opportunity to step back from the day-to-day recovery from the COVID pandemic and consider long-term strategies related to holistic economic and community development. To achieve this progress, the EDA award and Resiliency Roadmap Program was broken down into three phases that DOLA facilitated in partnership with OEDIT, Community Builders, and with each of the 16 regional teams participating:

- **Phase 1: Groundwork.** These initial sessions set a foundation for regional partnerships while building a consensus on resiliency needs based on discussion, data, and ground-truthing of economic and community development activities in the region.
- **Phase 2: Planning.** Each region was paired with their own Roadmap Consultant with the outcome of a Resiliency Roadmap Plan that is action-oriented.
- **Phase 3: Implementation.** State and partner support was provided to each region to implement the near-term actions in their Roadmap Plan. State support included funding navigation, technical assistance, and support for continued team collaboration.

## Progress

The Roadmaps Program brought together 16 Regional Community Teams made up of over 150 rural jurisdictions in addition to non-governmental partners. Since November 2021, these local partners actively worked with the State and their own Roadmaps consultant to prioritize and strategize around shared regional objectives through a two-year planning and implementation process.

Each Regional Community Team has developed a Resiliency Roadmap that documents regionally-aligned, actionable, and prioritized strategies that will help Colorado's rural communities recover from COVID and be more resilient to future disruptions.

Perhaps more important than the plans themselves was the regional planning processes and the impact it had on forging new relationships within regions, regional trust-building, strengthening formal partnerships/entities, and building consensus for shared priorities, which is detailed further in the press spotlight below and following (“Outcomes”) section.



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### Press Spotlight: Progressing Roadmap Strategies

- World Journal Newspaper (June 6, 2024). [Truck driving school to open a new branch at industrial park](#)
  - National Association of Counties (December 30, 2023). [Coal Power Plant Closures Spur Regional Response in Northwest Colorado](#)
  - DOLA (March 2024). [Western San Luis Valley Resiliency Roadmap video](#)
  - Prowers Economic Prosperity. [Interactive Brochure and Video](#)
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## Outcomes

### Outcome 1: Jobs Created and Capital Formation

The Resiliency Roadmap Program resulted in the creation of 842 jobs and formation of \$9,386,882 in capital. The following breaks down the programs that contributed to these successes:

- Rural Jump Start Tax Credits and Grants
  - Job creation: 163
  - Capital Formation: \$605,000
- Commercial Historic Preservation Tax Credit
  - Capital Formation: \$674,644
- Venture Capital Authority Investments

- Jobs Created: 91
  - Capital Formation: \$3,888,734
- Strategic Fund Job Growth Incentive:
  - Jobs Created: 24
- Advanced Industries Investment Tax Credit:
  - Jobs Created: 12
  - Capital Formation: \$415,000
- Advanced Industries Investment Early Stage Retention Grant
  - Jobs Created: 552
  - Capital Formation: \$3,397,503

## **Outcome 2: Roadmap Implementation through the Rural Technical Assistance Program**

A critical part of the Resiliency Roadmaps Program has been to support each of the 16 regional teams in not only creating their Roadmap, but also implementing strategies from their Roadmap.

One tangible way the State helped implement Roadmap strategies was through OEDIT's Rural Technical Assistance Partnership, which put out a call for proposals to each of the 16 regional teams. OEDIT funded one project in each region that advanced their Roadmap priorities in a collaborative, regional way. The following is a summary of the 16 awards made to Roadmap teams:<sup>1</sup>

### **In-Depth Studies and Plans**

1. \*Central San Juan High Alpine (Region 9): Completed a recreation study of the Central San Juan High Alpine area to inform future prioritization of management actions and recreation plans.
2. \*Southeast Colorado (Southern Colorado Economic Development District): Commissioned a study to identify alternative uses for abandoned greenhouses in Crowley County with the intention of creating jobs by opening new business ventures in the currently vacant greenhouses. The process will also expand business support capacity in the region.
3. \*Northern Colorado (Town of Kersey): Hired a consultant to advance the Kersey Multimodal Downtown Connectivity Project to conduct four tasks: a property appraisal of a Railroad Right of Way between Weld County Road 49 and State Highway 34; resource inventory and evaluation; conceptual design of the transit route from downtown Kersey to Evans via the Freedom Parkway (Weld County Road 54); and conduct ownership and encumbrance title research.
4. \*Eagle County/Valley: Completed workforce development ecosystem mapping that will consider community needs and workforce development opportunities holistically across the Northwest Colorado region's interdependent smaller rural communities.

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<sup>1</sup> NOTE: 11 out of 16 teams were funded through the Resiliency Roadmaps Program (both EDA funding and State match to EDA funding) and are demarcated with an asterisk (\*). OEDIT funded the other 5 teams outside of the Resiliency Roadmaps Program and separate from EDA funding in order to fulfill their commitment to support all teams in their Roadmap implementation.

This study will identify all current and potential partners/programs to support workforce development; identify career pipelines to address industry needs; identify technical assistance programs across the region; and provide feedback related to commuter patterns.

5. Summit County: Surveyed local businesses to identify needs, while also mapping the opportunities and resources available to entrepreneurs at each stage of their trajectory. This will create a stronger support network and more intentional connections, and a compilation of relevant resources into brochures and web materials for local business owners.
6. Gunnison County: Hired a local consultant to outline a communication strategy that will increase and deepen community engagement and diversify and expand community leadership. Communications support and funding will help One Valley Leadership Council (OVLG) communicate with the ever-changing lineup of elected officials and the general public on the strategies, actions, and needs developed in the One Valley Resiliency Roadmap (OVRG). The project is focused on three areas of work: affordable housing; land use, transportation, infrastructure; and civic capacity.

#### **Advancing Strategy and Development of Regional Branding and Marketing, including Physical Signage, Print Materials, and Digital Marketing**

7. \*East Central Council of Government: Developed a regional brand and marketing campaign, including uniform regional signage for each community. Advanced the “Stop Stay Spend” Strategy.
8. \*Northeast Colorado (Morgan County Economic Development Council): Developed and completed a “Return to Rural” regional marketing campaign for site selection to tell the story of the region and the experience of living in it. The campaign is intended to attract businesses by highlighting the authentic stories that make the community unique.
9. \*Northwest Colorado: Developed an economic development website to grow and diversify the regional economy in the three-county region to replace the financial loss from the coal transition. The website is an essential marketing tool to manage regional tourism, generate business development leads, recruit new companies to rural Northwest Colorado, and provide information about incentives and resources for existing businesses and workforce training opportunities for dislocated energy workers. This team also hosted a “Building Better Places Workshop” in Rifle, CO.
10. Mesa County First Responders: Improved way-finding signage for the businesses in order to stimulate the local economy in De Beque and Mesa County, leading to growth and job creation.

#### **Expanding Human Capacity**

11. \*South Central Council of Governments (Huerfano County Economic Development): Funded staff to administer a Brownfields grant from the EPA for up to 12 properties in Huerfano County; continue with the development of an industrial park on the south side of Walsenburg; and continue the housing development project.
12. Montezuma County: Hired a Community Involvement Coordinator to serve as the coordinating entity for leadership development, networking opportunities, and economic development.
13. South/Eastern San Luis Valley: Hired an experienced economic development director in order to bolster efforts to attract projects and funding, and will support local businesses in the county.

14. Pitkin/Roaring Fork Valley: Funded professional services to implement projects coming out of the region’s Roadmap, which created the West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition and the Regional Housing Toolkit.

#### Local Business Support

15. \*Western San Luis Valley (Town of Center and Del Norte) - Launched a competitive mini-grants program for homegrown entrepreneurs in the region, which will bring critical financial support directly to local entrepreneurs and small businesses. These grants are intended to promote job retention, job creation, entrepreneurship, and capital formation by providing grants that enable small businesses and entrepreneurs to scale and sustain their enterprises.

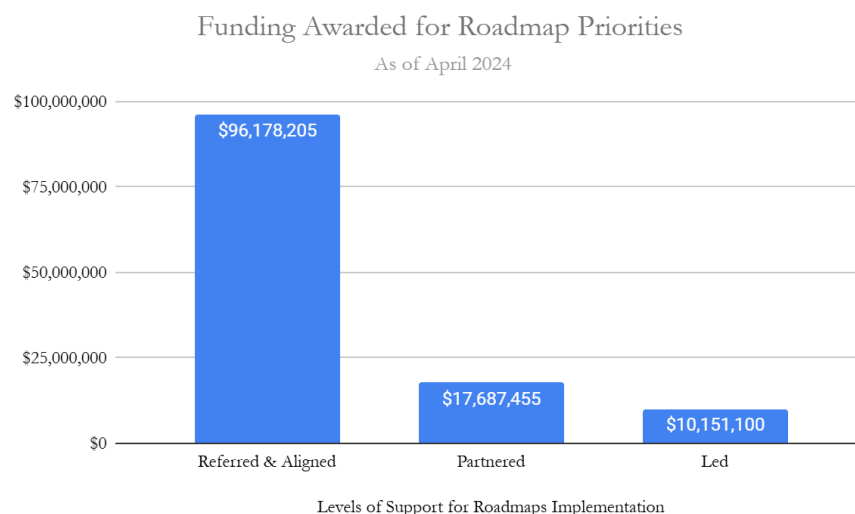
#### Advancing Broadband Efforts

16. Clear Creek County/Gilpin County/Nederland: Commissioned a contractor to support expansion of rural broadband efforts in partnership and with funding from the Colorado Broadband Office.

### Outcome 3: Roadmap Implementation through Technical Assistance and Funding

Since working with 16 rural Regional Community Teams through the Roadmaps Program, the State Partnership Team has played a role in awarding over \$124.4M to jurisdictions in the Roadmaps Program.

During the heart of the Resiliency Roadmap Program (2022 and 2023), staff hired under the Resiliency Roadmap Program assisted each of the 16 regional teams in navigating funding opportunities aligned with their regional priorities. The assistance provided to teams spans a spectrum from (1) referring communities to funding opportunities, to (2) partnering with the communities, to (3) leading regional communities through the Roadmaps planning process that resulted in funding awards, as further illustrated in the following graph and narrative.



- Referred & Aligned: Over \$96.1M has been awarded to Roadmaps jurisdictions that were referred to funding opportunities that are aligned with Roadmaps priorities. For example:
  - Twelve grants totaling \$20M from the OEDIT Colorado Creative Industries “Community Revitalization Grants”
  - Seventeen grants totaling \$8.35M from the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing to improve health care affordability and access to care in rural Colorado through the Rural Provider Access and Affordability Stimulus Grant Program
- Partnered: Over \$17.6M has been awarded to Roadmaps jurisdictions that partnered with the State Partnership Team, who provided guidance and technical assistance in order to support them in successful applications. For example:
  - Five grants totaling nearly \$2.4M from the DOLA-managed Energy and Mineral Impact Fund (EIAF)
  - Twenty two grants totaling \$1.3M were awarded from the OEDIT Colorado Tourism Office through “Tourism Management Grants” and “Tourism Marketing Matching Grants”
  - Fifteen grants totaling ~\$1.9M went to Roadmap Communities through the DOLA “Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Grants”
  - Sixteen grants totaling over \$6.7M were awarded to Roadmap communities through the DOLA “Main Street Open for Business Grants”
- Led: Nearly \$10.1M has been awarded to Roadmaps Regional Community Teams for regional applications where the Roadmaps State Partnership Team and planning process played a leading role in supporting, prioritizing, or coordinating partners with the Regional Community Team for successful regional activity. So far, we have led Regional Community Teams to the following.
  - An \$8.67M award from the Colorado Broadband Office went to a Roadmap team (Nederland, Gilpin County, and Unincorporated Boulder County) that will bring broadband to 2,725 addresses in areas classified as underserved (more information in the [Gilpin County Award Announcement](#)). The project will advance the broadband strategy developed through their Resilience Roadmap process.
  - Over \$650K was awarded to each of the 16 Regional Community Teams through the non-competitive Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) Roadmaps Implementation Funding (see Outcome 2 above).
  - About \$550K in REDI Grants were awarded and tied directly to Roadmap plans (e.g., Summit County for an Economic Gardening Pilot Project; the Town of Saguache to expand a Youth Enterprise Zone concept)
  - Over \$500K in DOLA Innovative Affordable Housing Planning Grants were directly a result of the Roadmaps progress (e.g., Western San Luis Valley Code and Strategy Development; Wray & NE CO Regional Project)

## Outcome 4: Lasting collaboration across jurisdictions

The regional planning processes had a significant impact on forging new relationships within regions; building trust among partners; strengthening formal partnerships and even launching new entities; and building regional consensus for shared priorities.

One key example of meaningful collaboration was with the Central San Juan High Alpine Regional Team, where they coordinated across a five county region for necessary public land management. Over the COVID-19 Pandemic, outdoor recreation on public lands increased substantially across is region, which resulted in overuse and an increase in irresponsible outdoor recreation practices which created strain on ecosystems, associated maintenance demands, and emergency response resources across the region. So, the Roadmaps process focused on coordinating public land management across the five-county region, bringing in federal public land managers to help address these challenges. The team continues to collaborate to create structures to institutionalize their multi-county partnerships. Steps in this direction include the creation of an MOU to support continuity across political and other transitions as well as detailed action plans with regional members assuming ownership to lead coordination and other activities.

This outcome was also shared during the [2nd Annual Virtual Colorado Resiliency Summit](#) (January 26, 2023). The CRO hosted a breakout session on “Collaborating Across Jurisdictions” that highlighted the value of regional collaborations spurred during the Resiliency Roadmaps Program.

Additional collaboration is highlighted in the press highlights below.



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### Press Spotlight: Fostering Lasting Collaboration for Rural Resiliency

- The Roadmaps Program work in the Roaring Fork Valley led to the creation of the West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition, with press hailing the creation of this new regional coalition and their work of “Building community through affordable housing initiatives” - See articles: [Roaring Fork Valley housing coalition inches closer to reality](#) (Feb 23, 2022) and [Greater Roaring Fork Valley Housing Coalition: Regional housing coalition carries Lamont’s legacy](#) (May 18, 2022).
  - In Montezuma County and Southwest Colorado, significant collaboration between local governments and the Tribes in the region has been a Roadmap highlight. See related articles: [Collective forms to address economic and social recovery in Southwest Colorado](#) (March 31, 2023) and [Community Collective Hosting Series of Resident Discussions](#) (April 6, 2023)
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## Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from the Resiliency Roadmaps Program have elevated common needs from across rural Colorado, which are being addressed in State and local programming that aim to meet the needs of these communities.

For example, all communities participating in the Resiliency Roadmap Program emphasized the need for more human capacity, especially to navigate COVID Recovery and other historic federal and state funding opportunities. In response, the State of Colorado Governor’s Office launched the [Regional Grant Navigator Program](#) that places 13 staff in each of the Councils of Governments across Colorado. The Regional Grant Navigators have all used the regional Roadmaps developed through the Resiliency Roadmap Program in order to understand regional priorities and strategies, then research and connect funding opportunities to advance those priorities.

Additional lessons learned have been shared publicly in the press spotlights listed below.



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### Press Spotlight: Sharing Successes and Lessons from the Resiliency Roadmaps Process

- [What’s Working: How the pandemic helped provide permanent funding for rural Colorado’s economic development](#) (February 3, 2024). Colorado Sun
  - [“Top Three Takeaways: Regional Resilience Planning in Rural Colorado”](#) (January 2023). American Planning Association, Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division E-newsletter
  - The DOLA CRO and Roadmaps Partners presented at the American Planning Association Colorado Chapter Annual Conference during a panel and workshop entitled, “Regional Approaches to Rural Resiliency and Recovery” (September 28, 2022)
  - Perspectives from various regional Resiliency Roadmap Teams from across Colorado are elevated in the video [Regional Roadmaps Building Resilience: Voices from Around the State](#). This CRO-produced video has been shared at various conferences and highlights some of the thematic outcomes listed below.
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