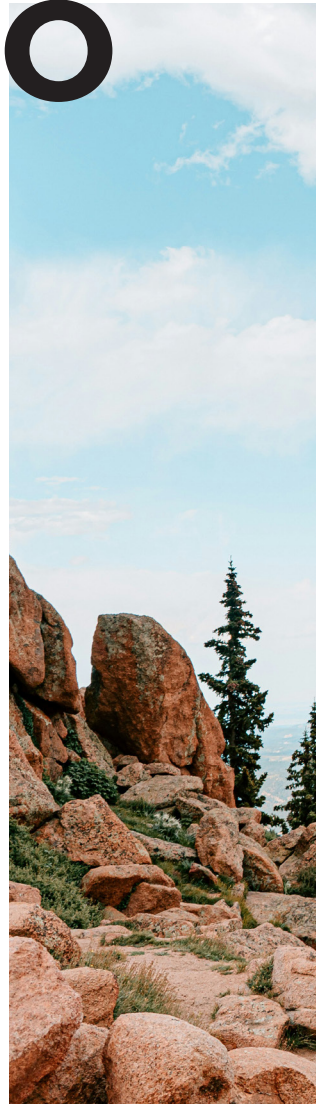
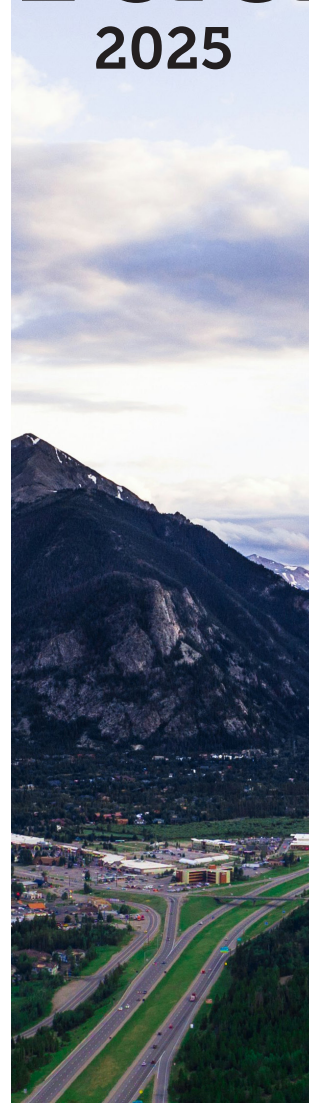


# Elevating Colorado

2025



A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY (CEDS) FOR THE STATE OF COLORADO



**COLORADO**

Office of Economic Development  
& International Trade

# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
Overview	4
CEDS Strategy Summary	5
<b>APPROACH</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
Background + Regions across Colorado	10
People	14
Places	18
Economy	21
<b>SWOT ANALYSIS</b>	<b>30</b>
Summary	30
Strengths	31
Weaknesses	32
Opportunities	33
Threats	34
<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTION</b>	<b>36</b>
Strategic Framework	36
Vision	36
Strategic Themes, Goals, Strategies	37
Housing	38
Job Creation + Business Development	40
Growing Key Industries	44
Quality of Life + Tourism	47
Community Infrastructure + Resources	50
<b>EVALUATION FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>ECONOMIC RESILIENCY</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>66</b>

# List of Figures

FIGURE 1	PAGE 12	FIGURE 11	PAGE 24-26
Colorado Planning & Management Regions: EDA Economic Development Districts (EDDs), Tribes, & CEDS Stewards		Colorado's Leading Accelerators, Incubators, and Entrepreneur Membership Support Organizations	
FIGURE 2	PAGE 14	FIGURE 12	PAGE 27
Single Year of Age by Race/Ethnicity: Colorado, 2023		Capital Invested X State	
FIGURE 3	PAGE 15	FIGURE 13	PAGE 27
Education Attainment (Population 25 Years and Older) in Colorado		Most Active Colorado VC Investors by Deal Count, 2023	
FIGURE 4	PAGE 16	FIGURE 14	PAGE 28
Annual Change of Total Housing Units and Household Population 2024 Forecast		Capital Invested X Vertical	
FIGURE 5	PAGE 17	FIGURE 15	PAGE 29
Components of Population Change 1970 to 2023: Colorado		Median Income by Types of Families	
FIGURE 6	PAGE 18	FIGURE 16	PAGE 41
Colorado Natural Regions		About Opportunity Now	
FIGURE 7	PAGE 18	FIGURE 17	PAGE 44
Map of Colorado Freight and Passenger Rail Systems, 2022		State Investment in Innovation	
FIGURE 8	PAGE 21	FIGURE 18	PAGE 45
SAGDP1 State Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Summary, Colorado		Jobs by Sector (DOLA), Colorado, 2023	
FIGURE 9	PAGE 23	FIGURE 19	PAGE 61
Estimated Job Openings in Colorado by Industry, Aug 2023-Aug 2024		Map of U.S. states with a CRO color-coded by position establishment	
FIGURE 10	PAGE 24	FIGURE 20	PAGE 64
Job openings as a percent of employment for the United States and Colorado, seasonally adjusted		Colorado Resiliency Framework	

## Note on Photography

Most photos used throughout this document are mostly from incredible photographers on Unsplash. [Learn more here.](#)  
Some photos are also from the Colorado tourism archive (page 11, bottom right; page 1, left).





# Executive Summary

BUILDING COLORADO'S ECONOMIC FUTURE—A COLORADO FOR ALL

## OVERVIEW

For many years, Colorado was known for only a select group of products: skiing, cattle and oil. While these remain important industries in the State, they are joined by an ever-growing array of high-tech and knowledge-intensive industries in one of the nation's most dynamic economies. In fact, Colorado is one of the most exciting hotbeds of American innovation and technology. It is perennially among the top 10 States for patents per capita, business creation rate, startup density, federal funding for R&D and total venture capital deals and expenditures. Breakthroughs and technological advances that change lives around the world can be traced back to Colorado.

Yet the State has a role to play in maintaining these competitive advantages and ensuring that all Colorado communities benefit from a strong economy. Colorado is taking bold and innovative actions to address key economic headwinds, like housing shortages, increasing natural disasters and workforce development needs. And it is working to ensure that State economic development plans continue to incorporate regional goals and outcomes so Coloradans across the State, in rural and urban areas, experience consistent and positive economic growth.

The 2025 State of Colorado Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that follows is based on the gold standard for economic development and developed in accordance with U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) guidelines. It is a five-year, actionable targeted strategic plan that articulates the economic vision and goals for Colorado while fostering greater collaboration across the State.



## CEDS STRATEGY SUMMARY

We envision a dynamic, vibrant economy that honors the unique strengths of our 14 planning and management regions and two Tribal nations. When we foster thriving industries, great jobs, attainable housing, and strong infrastructure, we can drive growth and innovation, enhance quality of life for Coloradans, and attract talent, businesses, investments, and visitors from around the world.

### Housing



#### GOAL ONE

Support the creation of and access to different types of housing options that meet the needs of each region's workforce and residents.

### Job Creation + Business Development



#### GOAL TWO

Support the attraction, retention and training of an adaptable, skilled talent pool.

#### GOAL THREE

Support business creation, expansion, retention and recruitment to strengthen regional economies and generate job growth.

### Growing Key Industries



#### GOAL FOUR

Enable and support the growth and development of existing state and regional target industries.

#### GOAL FIVE

Encourage diversified and emerging industries to drive economic growth.

### Quality of Life + Tourism



#### GOAL SIX

Support the revitalization and development of vibrant, livable communities.

#### GOAL SEVEN

Continue to responsibly steward and strengthen the state's robust tourism/travel, outdoor recreation and arts/creative industries

#### GOAL EIGHT

Protect and provide access to all our natural resources and expand the state's ability to respond to natural disasters and other disruptions and mitigate their impacts.

### Community Infrastructure + Resources



#### GOAL NINE

Support strategic infrastructure investments that save money, enhance broadband connectivity, mobility, transportation, job growth, business development and quality of life.

#### GOAL TEN

Enable and increase access to community services (e.g., childcare, education, healthcare, mental health, and resources for people of all ages and abilities).



## Approach

COLLABORATIVE. COMPREHENSIVE. REGION-DRIVEN.

This CEDS was authored by the Rural Opportunity Office (ROO) at the State of Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), but it is the product of a powerful collaboration—co-created with State and regional partners who brought a wide range of expertise, deep experience, and local insights from every corner of Colorado.

### PRINCIPLES OF OUR APPROACH



### KEY ROLES & COLLABORATORS



The following organizations were involved in the development of this CEDS:

**State of Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)**

*OEDIT—Business Funding and Incentives (BF&I)*  
*OEDIT—Business Support (SBDC)*  
*OEDIT—Colorado Creative Industries (CCI)*  
*OEDIT—Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office (OREC)*  
*OEDIT—Colorado Tourism Office (CTO)*  
*OEDIT—Executive Office (EO)*  
*OEDIT—Global Business Development (GBD)*  
*OEDIT—Marketing & Communications*  
*OEDIT—Minority Business Support (MBO)*  
*OEDIT—Rural Opportunity Office (ROO)*

**Southern Ute Indian Tribe**

**Ute Mountain Ute Tribe**

**Economic Development Council of Colorado (EDCC)**

**CO | Align**

**Colorado State Demography Office**

**State of Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA)**

*Colorado Resiliency Office (CRO)*

**State of Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE)**

*Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium (CRWC)*

**Colorado Association of Regional Organizations (CARO)**

*Associated Governments of Northern Colorado (AGNC)*  
*Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)*  
*East Central Council of Governments (ECCOG)*  
*Northeast Colorado Association of Local Governments (NECALG)*  
*Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG)*  
*Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG)*  
*Pueblo County*  
*Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado/Southwest Colorado Council of Governments*  
*Region 10 (Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray & San Miguel Counties)*  
*San Luis Valley Development Resources Group (SLVDRG)*  
*South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG)*  
*Southeast Colorado Enterprise Development (SECED)*  
*Southern Colorado Economic Development District (SCEDD)*  
*Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments (UAACOG)*  
*Upstate Colorado*

**Colorado Workforce Development Council**

**State of Colorado Office of Information Technology (OIT)**

**Office of the Governor**





## PROCESS & TIMELINE

### JAN-FEB

#### Project Kickoff

*Review current draft and align on content gaps/development*

*Identify collaborators (content input and collaboration, key decisions, sign-off)*

*Confirm timeline and milestones*

#### Document Review + Gap Analysis

*Review backgrounding materials and documents for key stories and data points*

*Identify if additional primary research is needed*

#### Regional Economic Development Work Sessions

*Align on content for strategic themes*

#### Working Group Kickoff

*Project updates + content inputs*

### MAR

#### Story Arc + Outline

*Develop story arc and report outline*

#### Regional Economic Development

##### Work Sessions

*Review draft SWOT*

*Continue to highlight key stories*

#### Collaborator Interviews

*Collect insights and perspectives from key partners*

*We will be requesting some inputs from CARO EDs on this*

#### Monthly Working Group Meetings

*Project updates + content inputs*

### APR

#### Draft Report

*Build out draft report*

*Finalize data and analysis*

*Confirm story call-outs and accompanying images*

#### Regional Economic Development Work Sessions

*Vision, Themes, Goals review*

#### Monthly Working Group Meetings

*Project updates + content inputs*

### MAY-JUN

#### Partner Report Review + Comments (May)

*Broader report review*

*Incorporate comments to finalize draft*

#### Report Finalization + Design (May)

*Incorporate comments*

*OEDIT graphics team to finalize report design, visual language and graphics*

#### Public Comment (June)

*Open comment period for public feedback (via newsletter)*

#### Monthly Working Group Meetings

*Project updates + content inputs*

### JUL-AUG

#### Incorporate Public Comments

*Incorporate relevant feedback from public comments*

#### Final CEDS Submitted to EDA

# Background/Introduction

With this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Colorado continues its commitment to implementing Statewide economic development planning that incorporates regional goals and outcomes. Referred to as “nesting,” the EDA encourages this type of planning through the development of regional and Statewide CEDS. In addition to aligning economic development strategies across the State and fostering collaboration, CEDS have been shown to help economic development initiatives attract investment and lead to more consistent, positive outcomes when funding is secured.

Over the past two years, the State of Colorado has assisted economic development regions across the State to develop and implement regional CEDS, leveraging the framework created by [Colorado’s Economic Development alignment initiative \(CO | Align\)](#). This marks the first time Colorado’s regions have all completed CEDS, which are currently in implementation. Ensuring every region and Tribe completed a CEDS was a fundamental step to guarantee that every voice and every part of Colorado contributed to the development of a Statewide economic development strategy.

Now, the 2025 State of Colorado CEDS offers a five-year, Statewide strategic plan that incorporates regional plans and articulates the State’s economic vision, creating a more unified and effective economic development approach across the State. The Statewide CEDS is an important tool to develop a collaborative ecosystem where economic development efforts are aligned, resources are targeted effectively, and all parts of Colorado can thrive. This living document outlines key goals, strategies and actions to maintain and grow the State’s competitive advantages, address economic headwinds and foster greater economic resiliency. It also includes key metrics designed to assess and guide progress.

It is important to note that the State of Colorado’s 2025 CEDS continues previous commitments to align Statewide strategies with regional goals, including *Colorado’s Blueprint 2.0* launched in 2015 and CO | Align, a collective initiative to align strategies, reduce redundancies and enhance capacity for economic development efforts across Colorado. This new 2025 Statewide CEDS builds on that strong foundation while incorporating current EDA guidelines and best practices. The resulting document, which follows, will guide the advancement of Statewide initiatives and facilitate future applications to grant programs supported by the EDA.

By benefiting all of Colorado’s 64 counties, including the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Indian Tribes, this important tool will better align strategies and funding Statewide to benefit all regions, attract more investment, build on local plans, foster collaboration, and create a more vibrant, resilient and prosperous economy for everyone in Colorado.

**#1**

Educational  
Attainment

**#1**

New Businesses

**#4**

Best State  
Economy

**#5**

Labor Force  
Participation  
Rate

**#7**

Best States to  
Start a Business

**#5**

Venture Capital  
Activity per Capita

**#7**

Wind Energy

**#5**

CleanTech

**#7**

Total Energy  
Production



# BACKGROUND + REGIONS ACROSS COLORADO

## Background

Colorado is a breathtaking State known for its diverse landscapes, from the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains to its expansive high plains and deep canyons. The State sits just west of the center of the country, right on top of the Continental Divide. Its central location makes an ideal home base to cater to markets across North America and beyond.

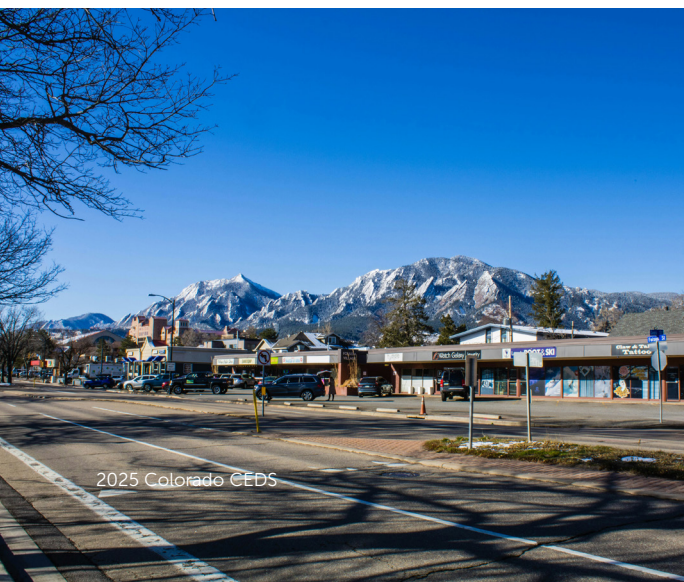
Home to over 5.8 million residents as of 2023, Colorado has ranked 16th for fastest population growth since 2020, outpacing the national average, attracting newcomers with its strong economy, outdoor recreation, and vibrant culture. The State welcomes over 86 million visitors annually, drawn to its world-class skiing, national parks, dynamic cities, and unique mountain towns.

Long before European settlers arrived, Indigenous peoples, including the Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne, called this land home. Their deep connection to the mountains, rivers, and valleys is reflected in many of the place names and traditions that endure today. As the Ute phrase “Núu-agha-távú-pá” (Land of the Ute) suggests, the land itself holds generations of history and meaning. Colorado’s rich cultural heritage is also evident in its nickname, the “Centennial State,” as it joined the Union in 1876, exactly 100 years after the Declaration of Independence.

With more than 300 days of sunshine per year, 58 14ers (mountains over 14,000 feet) and four national parks, Colorado is an outdoor enthusiast’s paradise. As John Denver famously sang, “Rocky Mountain High, Colorado,” has a spirit of adventure and natural beauty that defines the State. Whether exploring the dramatic cliffs of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, hiking a 14er, or immersing oneself in Colorado’s thriving arts, culinary, and music scenes, the State offers an unforgettable experience for all who visit.



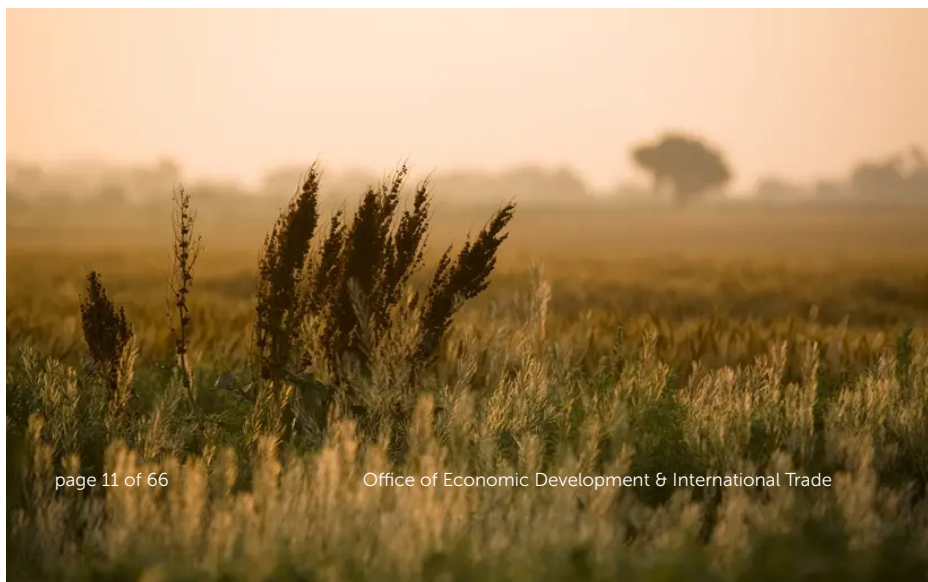




## Regions

Colorado is often categorized into distinct regions, each with its own geographic, cultural, and economic characteristics. These include the Front Range, the Western Slope, the Eastern Plains, and the high-altitude mountain communities of the Rockies. The Front Range, home to cities like Denver, Boulder, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, serves as the State's economic and cultural hub, with major industries, universities, and a thriving arts scene. The Western Slope, stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the Utah border, is known for its dramatic landscapes, outdoor recreation, and agricultural economy, including vineyards and orchards. The Eastern Plains, covering nearly half the State, remain deeply tied to agriculture and rural traditions, offering vast open spaces and a glimpse into Colorado's ranching heritage. Moving westward across the State, communities transition from bustling metropolitan areas to quieter towns, mountain communities and the San Luis Valley, a high mountain valley, rich in agriculture production and ranching lands.

Colorado's primary thoroughfare across the State is via major highways like I-25, which runs north-south along the Front Range, and I-70, which connects the plains to the mountains and Western Slope. Denver International Airport (DEN) serves as a major gateway for domestic and international visitors, while regional airports, scenic byways, and ever-expanding rail services provide additional connectivity for goods and passengers.





Colorado is divided into 14 planning and management regions, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, representing the State's unique regional economies.

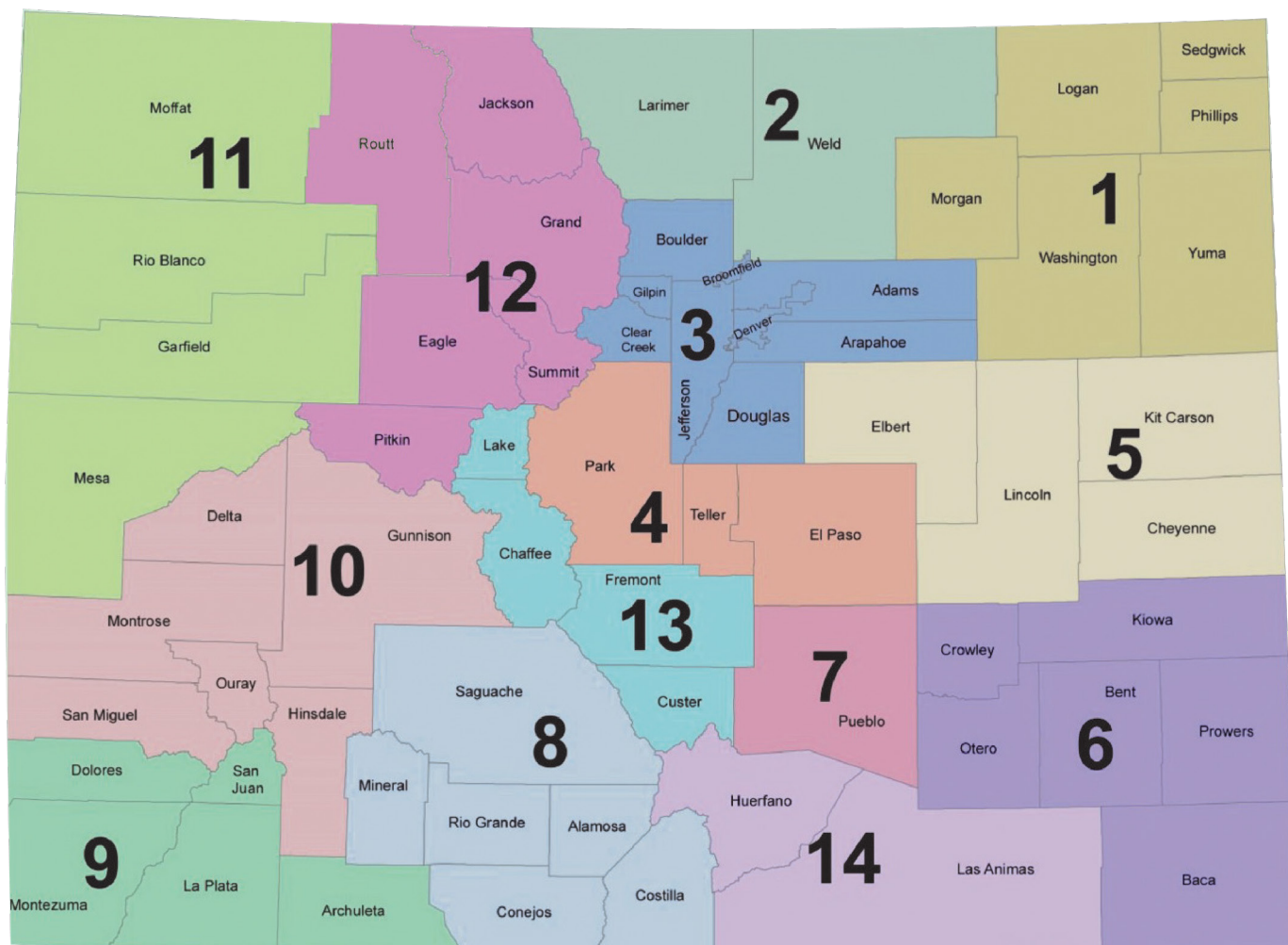


FIGURE 1

### Colorado Planning & Management Regions: EDA Economic Development Districts (EDDs), Tribes, & CEDS Stewards

Region 1: Northeast CO Association of Local Governments (NECALG)\*\*\*

Region 2: Upstate CO\*\*\*

Region 3: Denver Regional COG (DRCOG)\*\*\*

Region 4: Pikes Peak Area COG (PPACG)\*\*\*

Region 5: Eastern CO COG (ECCOG) EDD

Region 6, 7, 13, 14: Southern CO EDD (SCEDD)

Region 8: San Luis Valley Resource Development Group (SLDRG) EDD

Region 9: Region 9 (R9) EDD + Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT) + Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT)

Region 10: Region 10 (R10) EDD

Region 11: Associated Governments of NW CO (AGNC) EDD

Region 12: Northwest CO COG (NWCCOG) EDD

\*\*\*Organization has a CEDS but is not an EDD (yet).

While Colorado has a strong State identity, each region and community has its own unique character, strengths and challenges. Issues such as housing attainability, water conservation, and wildfire management impact the State as a whole, though some communities experience them more acutely than others. A balance between local initiatives and Statewide efforts is essential to ensure Colorado's continued economic strength, environmental sustainability, and high quality of life.

There are two federally recognized Tribes with jurisdiction in the State: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. The Tribes are connected to different economic regions of the State and have their own CEDS. While both the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe share a common federally recognized Ute heritage and are federally recognized, they differ in several key areas of note:

## Southern Ute Indian Tribe

### LOCATION

*Based in Ignacio, Colorado, with a reservation primarily in La Plata County.*

### POPULATION & COMMUNITY

*Smaller in number (~1,500 members) and benefits from a stronger economic base and infrastructure.*

### CULTURAL FOCUS

*Preserves Ute traditions and languages.*

### GOVERNANCE & ECONOMY

*Developed an effective governance structure, which has strategically guided diversification of its economy through the Southern Ute Growth Fund's investments in key sectors like energy, real estate, and private equity.*

## Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

### LOCATION

*Headquartered in Towaoc, Colorado, with lands extending into New Mexico and Utah.*

### POPULATION & COMMUNITY

*Slightly larger population (~2,100 members) but is more rural and less economically diversified.*

### CULTURAL FOCUS

*Preserves Ute traditions and language, particularly noted for its traditional pottery and crafts.*

### GOVERNANCE & ECONOMY

*The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe is governed by elected tribal officials to include Chairman Heart, Vice-Chairman Alston Turtle, Treasurer Darwin Whiteman, Secretary Conrad Jacket, Tawnie Knight Councilwoman, Malcom Lehi. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe has embraced its rich cultural heritage and unique natural landscape, which has formed the foundation of its vibrant tourism, gaming, and artisan industries, offering authentic cultural and economic opportunities. Ute Mountain Ute Tribe is opening the Ute Mountain Indian Trading Company, Museum and Visitor Center which will serve as the central hub for tourism showcasing the Ute Mountain heritage. The Ute Mountain is also planning to open a small grocery store, which will showcase flour and cornmeal and beef all grown and raised at their Ute Mountain Farm & Ranch along with produce grown in our Grow Dome.*



These distinctions highlight the unique paths each Tribe has taken in governance, economic development, and cultural preservation—all key elements to consider when taking a Statewide view for Colorado's CEDS.

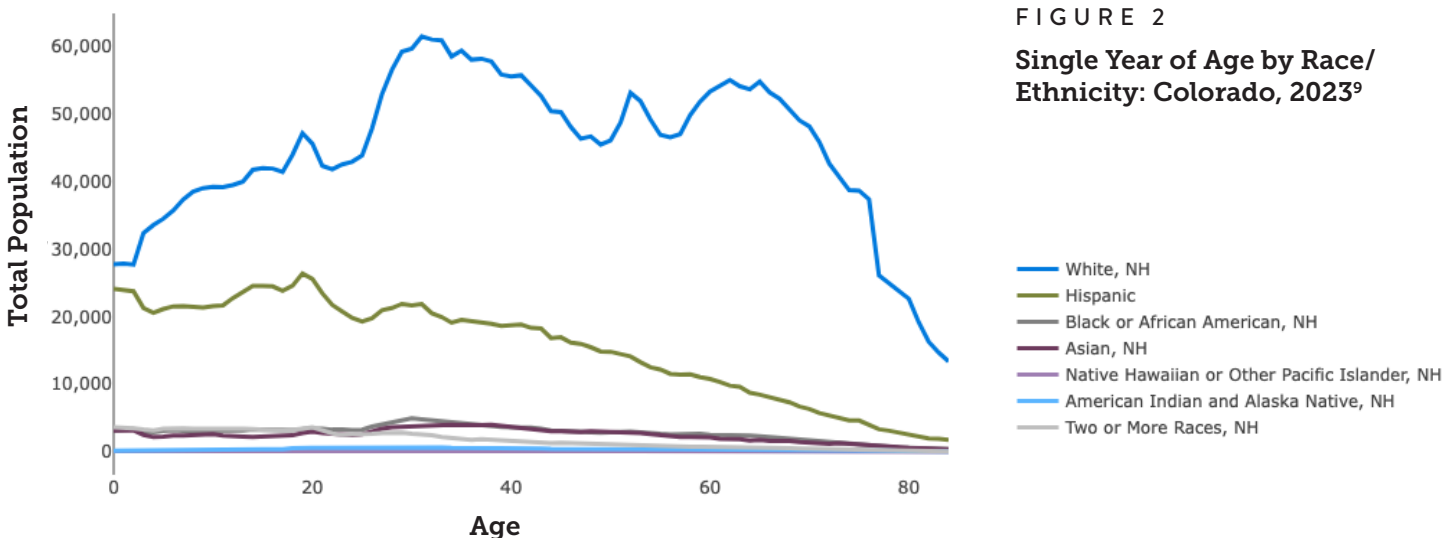


## PEOPLE

Colorado has been inhabited for thousands of years, originally home to Indigenous peoples such as the Ute, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and other Tribes. These communities maintained deep connections to the land long before European settlers arrived in the 19th century. Today, Colorado's population has grown significantly, reflecting both historical migration patterns and recent demographic trends. The State's population surged from about one million in 1930 to just under 5.9 million in 2023, with the State Demographer projecting it to reach nearly seven million by 2040. This rapid growth has been fueled by a strong economy, outdoor lifestyle, and high quality of life, attracting young professionals and drawing retirees as frequent visitors and tourists.

### FROM 2024 TALENT PIPELINE REPORT

While Colorado continues to experience new job growth and high job openings, finding enough skilled talent is still a concern for many employers. Employers in 2024 are most concerned about finding **qualified** employees (i.e., having the proper skills to succeed in a particular role) who will remain working for the same company for a longer period of time. Getting more people into credential and training programs for in-demand jobs will be essential to supporting Colorado's future workforce needs. [Click here to view the report.](#)



Colorado's demographics are ever evolving. While the State remains predominantly white (66 percent as of the 2023 State Demography Office estimates), the Hispanic and Latino population has grown to 23 percent, making it one of the fastest-growing racial and ethnic groups in the State. And among those under the age of 18, 33 percent are Hispanic. Other racial and ethnic groups, including Black, Asian, and Indigenous populations, have also seen increases, particularly in urban centers like Denver, Aurora, and Colorado Springs. As of 2023, Colorado's median age is 37.9, which ranks it as the ninth youngest State, and is below the national median of 39.2. Colorado's relative youth is largely due to an ongoing influx of young professionals drawn to the State for its thriving job market and quality of life.

Similar to national trends, Colorado's population is aging. The State's population aged 65 and older increased by 9.5 percent between 2020 and 2023, and is expected to increase by an additional 22 percent by 2030, and 60 percent by 2050. These trends will present both challenges and opportunities for healthcare, housing, and workforce sustainability. The expected increase of over 200,000 people aged 65 and older will come with an increasing number of retirements. Net migration to the State is needed to fill these retirement vacancies, as there are not enough young Coloradans aging into the workforce to meet the combined need for workers to fill these retirement vacancies and maintain job growth.



Education levels in Colorado are notably high, with 93 percent of residents aged 25 and older having at least a high school diploma, and 46 percent holding a bachelor's degree or higher, well above the national average of 36 percent and ranking Colorado third among all States.<sup>1</sup> Colorado offers a strong network of higher education institutions across the State, contributing to a well-educated workforce. From the Front Range to the Western Slope, universities like the University of Colorado in Boulder and Denver, Colorado State University in Fort Collins and Pueblo, the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, and Western Colorado University in Gunnison play key roles in developing talent across a range of disciplines and regions. The State's growing technology, aerospace, and renewable energy industries have also attracted highly skilled and educated workers from across the country.

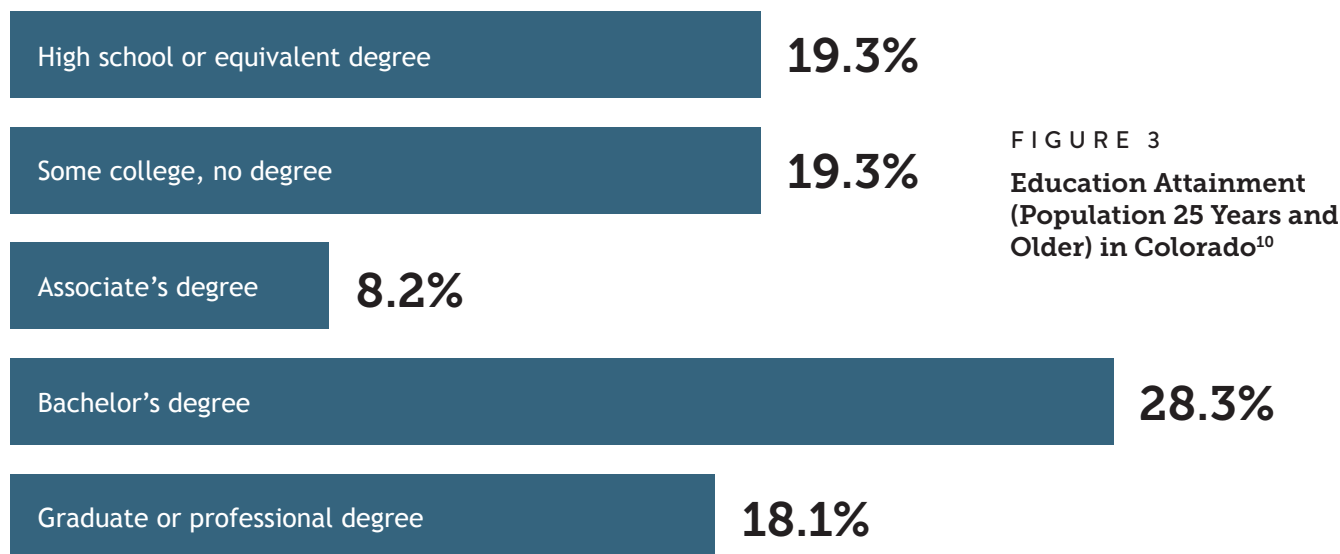


FIGURE 3  
Education Attainment  
(Population 25 Years and  
Older) in Colorado<sup>10</sup>

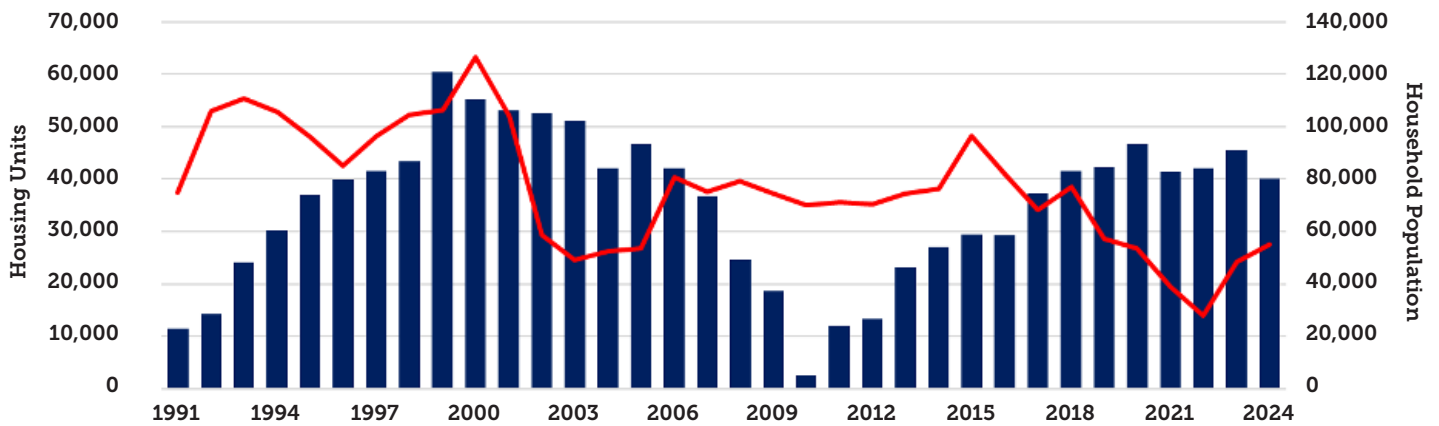
Housing affordability has become a major challenge in Colorado, particularly in urban and mountain resort areas. The median home price in Colorado reached approximately \$580,000 in 2024,<sup>2</sup> a steep increase from around \$285,000 in 2015.<sup>3</sup> In high-demand areas such as Boulder, Aspen, and Vail, median home prices exceed one million dollars, making housing unattainable for many residents. Rent has also risen significantly, with Denver's median rent reaching over \$2,000 per month in 2024. The demand for housing is compounded by the State's popularity as a destination for remote workers, retirees, and second homeowners, particularly in resort towns where short-term rentals further tighten the market.<sup>4</sup> Recent data show stabilization in home prices and lower rents, reflecting a better balance of supply and demand for housing. Additionally, some areas of the State remain relatively affordable. According to Realtor.com, in its top housing markets for 2025 report, it ranked Colorado Springs, CO in the top spot as a relatively affordable area, [preferred by young families](#) with plenty of homes for sale.



FIGURE 4

**Annual Change of Total Housing Units and Household Population 2024 Forecast<sup>11</sup>**

■ Annual Change Total Housing Units  
— v24 Annual Change Household Population



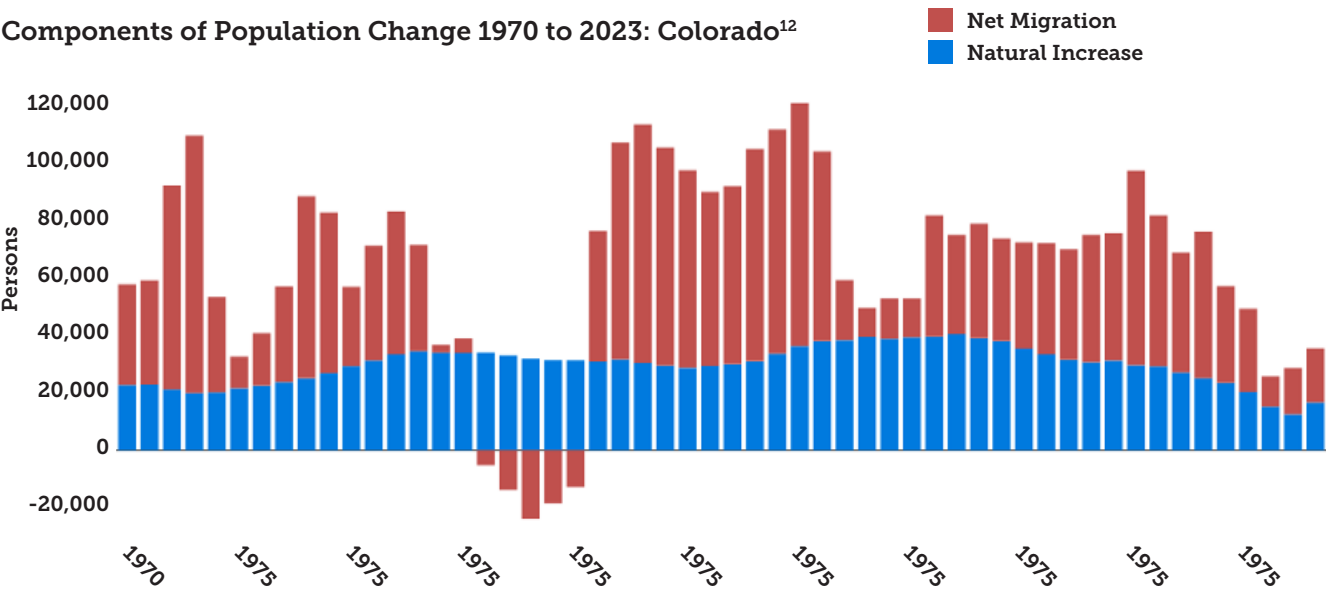
Employment opportunities vary widely across the State. The Front Range hosts major industries such as technology, healthcare, aerospace, and finance. While tourism is a dominant economic driver in the Western Slope and mountain regions, the area is also home to a growing wine industry and a rich tradition of agriculture. The region's orchards produce the world-renowned Palisade peaches, and farms in the area cultivate Olathe Sweet™ Sweet Corn, both of which contribute to the area's economy and cultural identity. Agriculture remains central to the economy of the Eastern Plains and the San Luis Valley, though it has faced challenges due to drought and changing economic conditions. The outdoor recreation industry, fueled by Colorado's world-class skiing, hiking, and national parks, supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, but many of these jobs are seasonal and lower paying, leading to workforce retention challenges in resort communities.

Colorado's population dynamics are shaped in part by migration trends. Although net migration has not returned to 2010 levels since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still a key contributor to the State's population growth. A relatively high cost of living in many areas in Colorado pose a risk to the future of the State's population and labor force growth, as workers may seek the combination of affordable housing and attractive labor market options elsewhere.





FIGURE 5  
 Components of Population Change 1970 to 2023: Colorado<sup>12</sup>



As Colorado continues to grow and evolve, balancing economic development, housing affordability and availability, and environmental sustainability will be critical to maintaining the State’s high quality of life. While challenges exist, the State’s strong economy and vibrant communities position it well for the future.



## PLACES

Colorado is a State of remarkable geographic diversity, encompassing the towering Rocky Mountains, high plains, deep canyons, and arid desert lands. With over 104,000 square miles, the State is the eighth largest State in the U.S. and is home to four national parks, 42 State Parks, and 26 scenic and historic byways. The State is 43 percent public land, which ranks at number 10 in the U.S. This public land consists of parks and open space, including Rocky Mountain National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, the Great Sand Dunes National Park and others, shining a light Colorado's natural beauty, a major draw for tourism and contributing over \$22 billion annually to the economy.

FIGURE 6

Colorado Natural Regions<sup>13</sup>

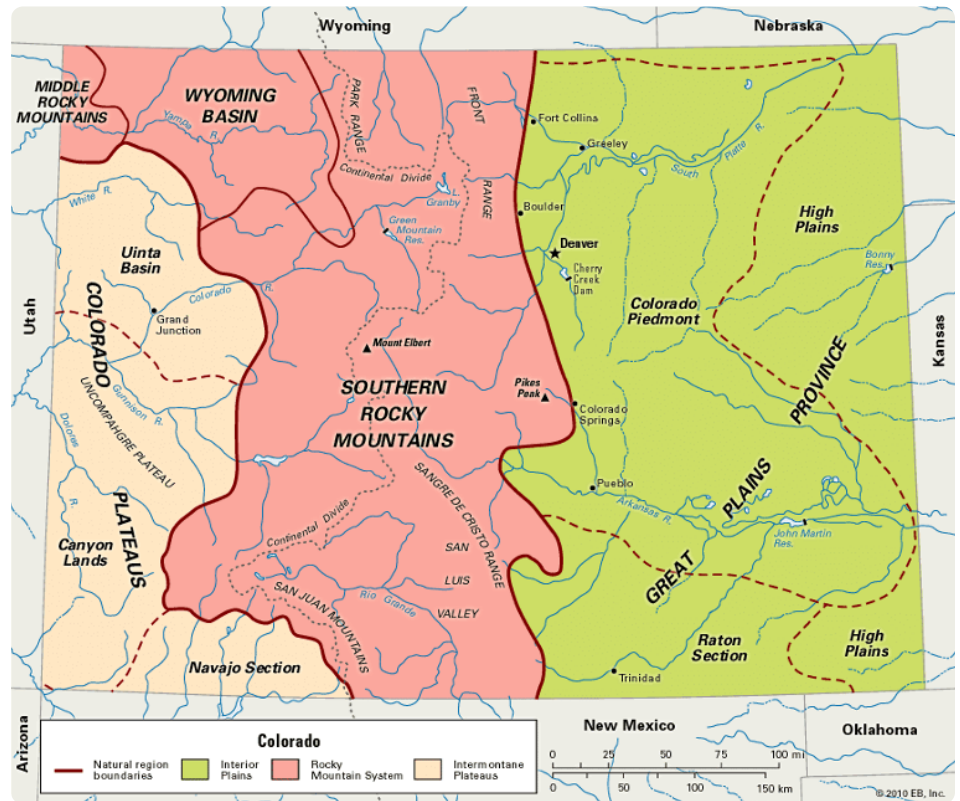
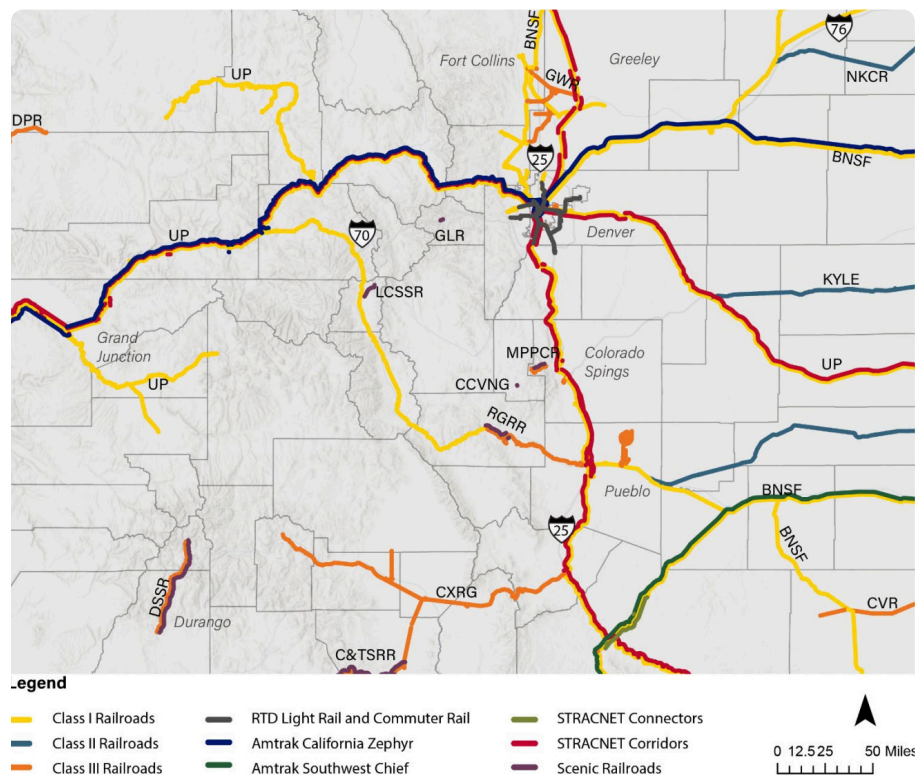


FIGURE 7

Map of Colorado Freight and Passenger Rail Systems, 2022







## GOVERNOR POLIS' COLORADO [TRANSPORTATION VISION 2035](#)

### Strategies to reduce pollution, advance affordability, and improve quality of life for all Coloradans.

*Transportation is key to a sustainable and vibrant future for all Coloradans. Efforts such as the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Pollution Reduction Roadmaps and the Greenhouse Gas Transportation Planning Standard have identified important state goals and actions that involve the transportation system, but the need for further transportation innovation remains. Outlining a systemic framework for expanded transportation choices is the purpose of this Colorado Transportation Vision 2035.*

Infrastructure in Colorado is a critical component of its economy and livability. The State has over 88,000 miles of highways, including major interstates such as I-25, I-70, and I-76, which serve as vital north-south and east-west transportation corridors for residents, visitors and freight transport.

Located on a 52.4-square-mile site (twice the size of Manhattan!), 25 miles northeast of downtown Denver, Denver International Airport (DEN) is the largest airport in North America by land area and the second largest in the world. DEN, ranked as the third busiest airport in the U.S. and the sixth busiest airport in the world, serves as a central hub for domestic and international travel.

Colorado's rail network supports the movement of goods, with more than 2,700 miles of freight railroad tracks carrying agricultural products, coal, and manufactured goods across the State and throughout the country. Additionally, the State is a key player in energy production and distribution, with extensive oil, gas, wind, and solar energy infrastructure. While the Front Range urban corridor is experiencing rapid population growth—home to roughly 85 percent of Colorado's 5.8 million residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau—a large portion of the State remains rural. This population concentration places increasing demand on roads, utilities, and public services in urban areas, while rural communities often face limited broadband access, aging infrastructure, and fewer healthcare and transportation options.





The State faces several natural and human-caused disaster risks, including wildfires, floods, severe storms, and droughts. Wildfires have become more frequent and intense in recent years, with the State experiencing some of its largest fires on record, including the 2020 Cameron Peak Fire that burned over 208,000 acres. Quickly thereafter, the 2021 Marshall Fire, one of the most destructive in Colorado's history, destroyed over 1,000 homes in Boulder County, highlighting the growing risk of wildfires in urban areas. Flooding is also a significant concern, especially in areas affected by wildfire burn scars, where heavy rains can lead to flash floods and mudslides. Western Colorado is particularly prone to landslides, with notable events such as the 2014 West Salt Creek Landslide in Mesa County, which caused significant destruction and fatalities.

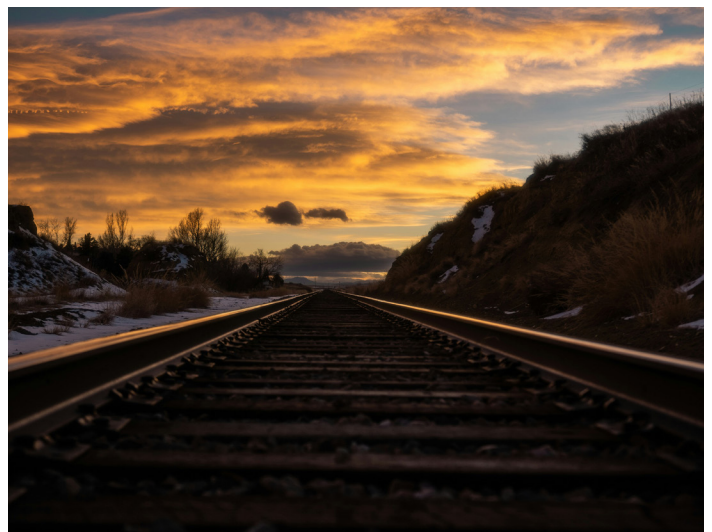
Compounding these challenges, the Rocky Mountains divide the State geographically, creating a critical east-west transit barrier. Weather events, wildfires, accidents, and construction in the mountains can severely disrupt transportation and supply chains, highlighting the need for resilient infrastructure and emergency planning across mountain corridors.

The State has created the Governor's Office of Climate Preparedness and Disaster Recovery, developed a [preparedness roadmap](#), and implemented mitigation efforts such as forest management programs, wildfire prevention measures, and improved emergency response

systems to address these growing threats. The Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) leads hazard mitigation programs, and Colorado is one of a few States with an [Enhanced State Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)—qualifying it for additional funding for mitigation projects following a disaster. Efforts also include forest management programs, wildfire prevention measures, and improved emergency response systems. Additionally, Colorado's high elevation and semi-arid climate contribute to ongoing water supply challenges, with efforts underway to manage the Colorado River Basin, secure water infrastructure, and ensure sustainable water resources for residents and agriculture.

Colorado serves as a critical hub for transportation and trade, given its central location in the United States. The State ranks among the top in freight movement, with key highways and rail networks facilitating the transport of goods between the West Coast, Midwest, and South. DEN plays a major role in global commerce, offering direct cargo flights to multiple international destinations. The State is also a leader in aerospace and advanced manufacturing, with industries relying on strong transportation infrastructure to support supply chains and exports. The presence of major distribution centers, including those of Amazon and Walmart, underscores Colorado's importance in logistics and supply chain management.

As the State continues to grow, investment in infrastructure, disaster preparedness, and environmental sustainability will be essential to maintaining Colorado's economic strength and quality of life. The balance between development, conservation, and resilience will shape the future of this dynamic and ever-evolving state.

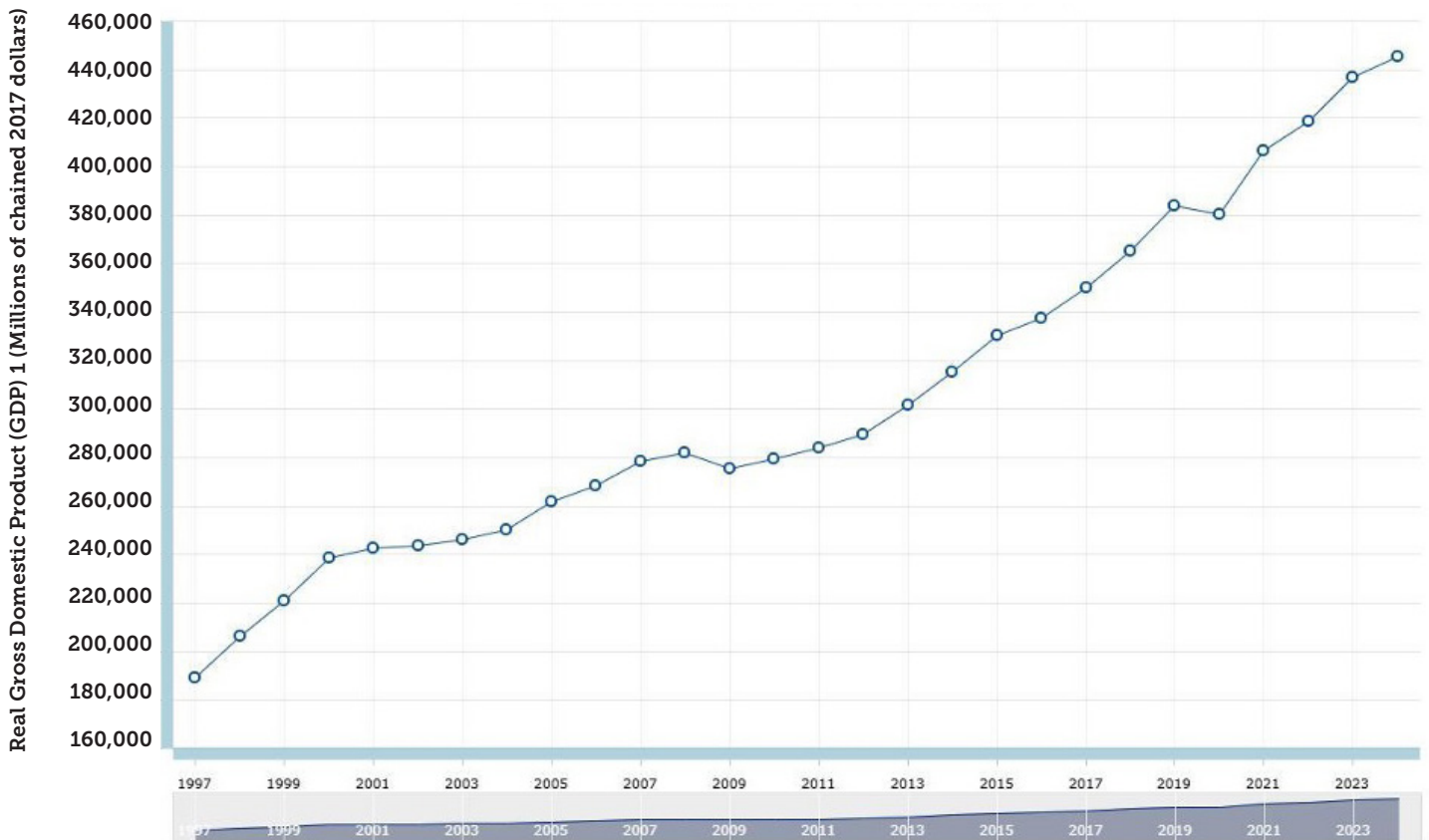


## ECONOMY

Colorado has undergone significant economic transformations, evolving from an economy historically reliant on mining and agriculture to a growing, innovation-driven economy. Today, the State's economic activity is centered around industries such as technology, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, tourism, agricultural production, and energy. In 2024, Colorado's gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately \$553 billion.<sup>5</sup> Private industries account for the vast majority of the State's GDP, making up around 88 percent of total economic output. As of 2024, Colorado's real (inflation-adjusted) GDP has grown 16 percent from pre-pandemic 2019 levels.<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary economic contraction of about 0.9 percent from 2019 to 2020, but by 2021, the State's economy had rebounded to its pre-pandemic trend.

FIGURE 8

**SAGDP1 State Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Summary, Colorado<sup>14</sup>**



Colorado's annual unemployment rate for 2024 was 4.3 percent, above the U.S. annual unemployment rates of four percent.<sup>7</sup> When looking at job growth in Colorado's key industries, the average annual job growth over the last five years outpaced U.S. average growth in eight industries including Bioscience, Aerospace, Information & Technology, and more.



Furthermore, when it comes to labor force participation, Colorado remains a leader. The State continues to outperform other states with its labor force participation rate returning to pre-pandemic levels at 67.7 percent in April of 2024 - fifth in the nation. This robust participation is partly attributable to the State's relatively younger population, as labor force participation rates tend to decline with age. Additionally, Colorado boasts a highly educated workforce, which correlates with higher labor force participation, particularly among women. Nationally, the labor force participation rate is 62.7 percent as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in April of 2024.

Although it remains strong, Colorado is seeing slower population growth in recent years across the State. In 2024, Colorado's population reached just over 5.9 million, ranking 21st in the U.S. The State grew by about 56 thousand people (0.9 percent) from the previous year, ranking 19th in total growth and 17th in percentage change.<sup>8</sup> This growth was slower than the previous decade's 74,000 annual average.

The slowing trend in the State's population growth can be attributed to multiple factors, including a declining number of births and slowing net migration to the State. Net migration appears to be driven primarily by increases in out-migration, rather than slowing in-migration, and may be influenced by Colorado's comparatively higher cost of living and housing costs. Colorado's economy remains vulnerable to a softening labor market and increased market volatility throughout the remainder of 2025.

#1

State in Private  
Aerospace  
Employment  
Concentration

Colorado Space Coalition, 2020

#6

State for  
Concentration  
of Creative Class  
Occupants

#4

State for  
Concentration of  
STEM Workers

Census Bureau, 2020

#3

State for Startup  
Early Job Creation

Kauffman Foundation, 2019

#2

State to Start a  
Business

FitSmallBusiness.com, 2019

#2

State for  
Technology &  
Science

Milken Institute, 2020

#1

State for Women-  
led Startups

Merchant Maverick, 2023

#1

State in Proso  
Millet Production<sup>15</sup>

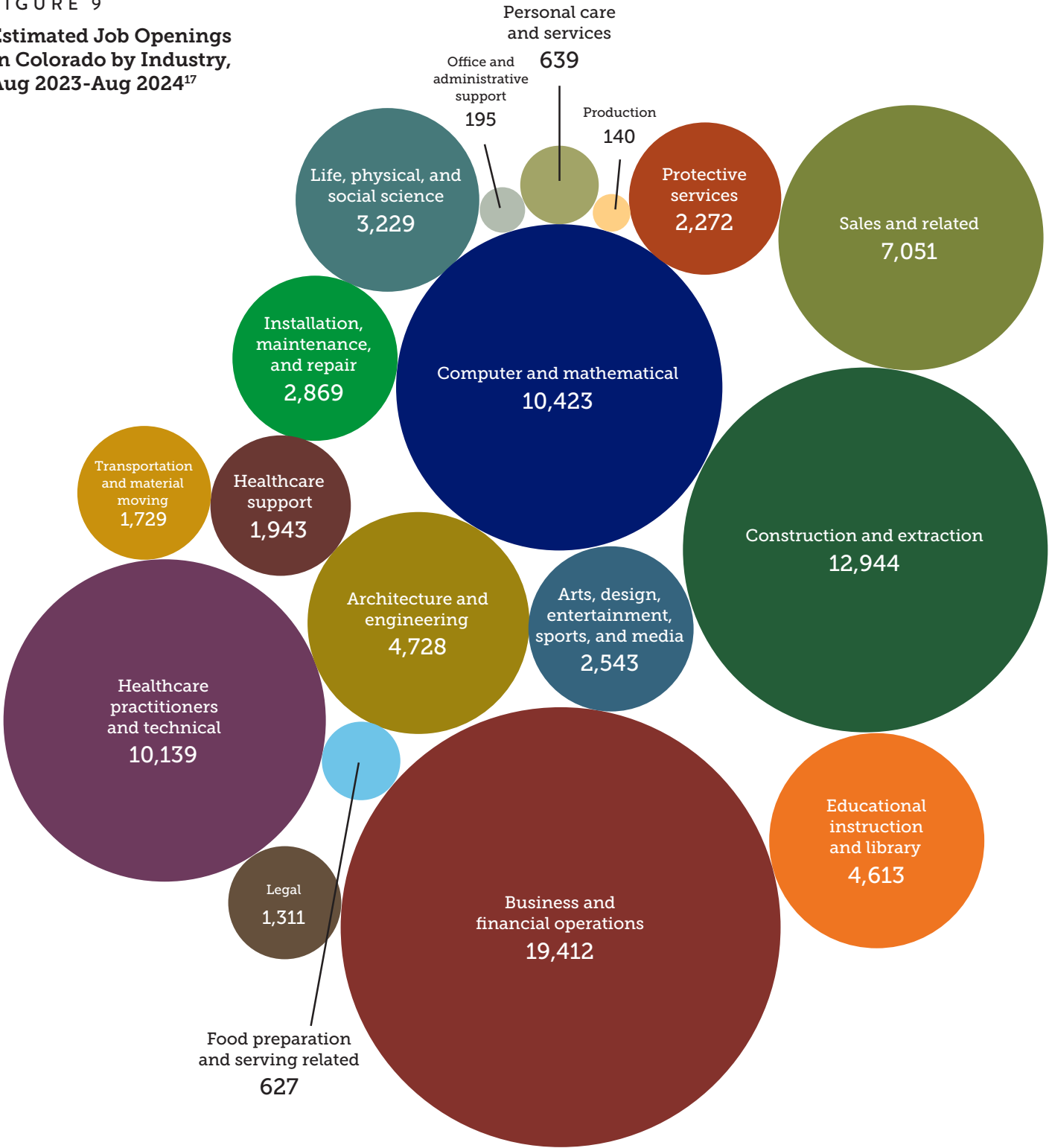
Merchant Maverick, 2023

Top 10

in Agricultural Commodities, including cattle and calves, winter wheat, sheep and lambs, wool, alfalfa, potatoes, onions, apples, peaches, grapes, and lemons<sup>16</sup>

When looking at Colorado’s industry sectors, professional and business services, health care and social assistance, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and construction are the top five industries by employment, comprising roughly 60 percent of the state’s workforce, and contributing about 35 percent of Colorado’s total GDP in 2024. The single largest contributor to the state’s GDP is the finance, insurance, and real estate sector, which accounts for nearly one-fifth of the total GDP while employing a much smaller portion of the workforce.

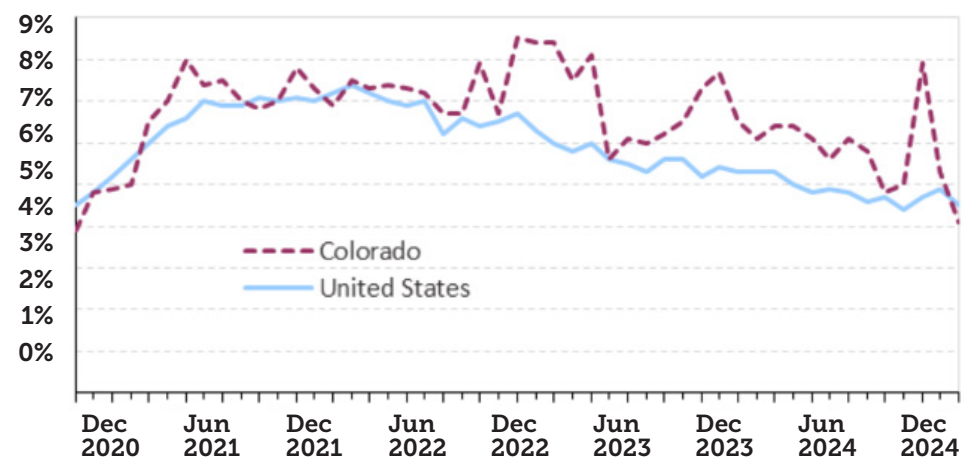
FIGURE 9  
Estimated Job Openings  
in Colorado by Industry,  
Aug 2023-Aug 2024<sup>17</sup>





While job growth, GDP, and labor participation are important indicators of an economy’s strength it is also important to note that Colorado’s entrepreneurial economy continues to perform well, particularly when looking at measures such as business starts, venture capital activity per capita, angel investing, and dynamism. The state hosts 44 accelerators, 19 incubators and 11 entrepreneur membership organizations, with programs spread across the state, offering various support services for startups, including mentorship, funding, and resources.

**FIGURE 10**  
**Job openings as a percent of employment for the United States and Colorado, seasonally adjusted<sup>18</sup>**



**FIGURE 11**  
**Colorado’s Leading Incubators, Accelerators, and Entrepreneurial Membership Support Organizations**

Accelerators

- Business accelerators are time-bound, cohort-based programs that support early-stage startups through:
- Mentorship
  - Education/training
  - Networking
  - Often includes investment readiness support, grant funding, or seed funding

Accelerator	Region	Accelerator Type
Techstars	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Boomtown	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Innosphere	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators
Exponential Impact	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Equity-Free Accelerators, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators, Place-Based
MergeLane	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Startup Colorado’s Idea Factory	Statewide/Virtual	Equity-Free Accelerators
Startup Colorado Growth Challenge	Statewide/Virtual	Equity-Free Accelerators
Ascent Accelerator (West Central Partnership)	Central Mountain	Place-Based, Equity-Free Accelerators, Public or Government-Backed Accelerators
Built Environment Innovators	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Telluride Venture Accelerator	SW Colorado	Seed
San Luis Valley DRG Innovation Lab	South Central	Place-Based
UpRamp	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
DISH Technologies Accelerator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Arrow Electronics Open Lab	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Catalyze CU	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	University-Based Accelerators, Youth Oriented
NSF I-Corps (CU Boulder + CSU)	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	University-Based Accelerators
CSU Ventures / CSU SPUR	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	University-Based Accelerators

Entrepreneurship@DU	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	University-Based Accelerators, Youth Oriented
Uncharted	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
ChangeXCO	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Leading Edge (SBA)	Statewide/Virtual	Public or Government-Backed Accelerators
NMotion (GAN)	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
EforAll—Greeley	NECO	Place-Based, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators
SCAPE (Durango)	SW Colorado	Seed
PEDCO / Southern Colorado Innovation Link	South Central, Pueblo SECO	Seed
Launch Valley (Alamosa)	South Central	Place-Based
Homegrown Pathways	Western Slope	Social Impact or Mission-Driven Accelerators , Seed, Place-Based, Public or Government-Backed Accelerators, Equity-Free Accelerators, Youth Oriented
Access Mode	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Social Impact or Mission-Driven Accelerators , Public or Government-Backed Accelerators, Equity-Free Accelerators, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators
FedTech	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Public or Government-Backed Accelerators, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators
I4E Colorado State University	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Denver Startup Academy	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Equity-Free Accelerators, Public or Government-Backed Accelerators
Bridge Entrepreneur Network (BEN)	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS), Statewide/Virtual	Seed
Impact Finance Center—Investor Accelerator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS), Statewide/Virtual	Seed
Founder Institute	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Ascent Deep Tech	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	University-Based Accelerators
Tech Source	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Public or Government-Backed Accelerators
APEX Accelerator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Public or Government-Backed Accelerators
Endeavor Colorado	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
Warehouse Business Accelerator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Place-Based
CO.Starters	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Equity-Free Accelerators
Crowdsolve	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Equity-Free Accelerators, Thematic/Vertical Accelerators
RVC Hyperaccelerator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Seed
SEA Change	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Equity-Free Accelerators, Social Impact or Mission-Driven Accelerators
Watson Institute	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Social Impact or Mission-Driven Accelerators

## Incubators

Business incubators provide ongoing, flexible support to early-stage businesses, typically through:

- Workspace or co-working access
- Administrative services (legal, HR, accounting)
- Basic business support and coaching (advising/mentoring)

Incubator	Region	Incubator Type
Startup Colorado	Statewide/Virtual	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
Chaffee County EDCC	Central Mountain	Traditional/Gen Business, Non-profit/Community
Business Incubator Center	Western Slope	Traditional/Gen Business, Non-profit/Community, Co-working
Telluride Venture Network	Western Slope	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
Innovation Center of the Rockies	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Unknown
The Commons on Champa	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific, Co-working



ICELab at Western Colorado University	Western Slope, Central Mountain	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Work-based/Apprenticeship
SBDC	Statewide/Virtual, I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
14 SBDC Regional Locations	Statewide/Virtual	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
Manufacturers Edge	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific, Work-based/Apprenticeship, Non-profit/Community
Comal Heritage Food Incubator	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
SCORE	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, Non-profit/Community
I4E Colorado State University	Statewide/Virtual, I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated
Park Hill Innovation Hub	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
DenSUN	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Traditional/Gen Business, University-Affiliated, Virtual, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
PEDCO / Southern Colorado Innovation Link	Pueblo SECO, South Central	Traditional/Gen Business, Non-profit/Community, Tech Incubation, Sector-Specific
Arrow Electronics Open Lab	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	
San Luis Valley DRG Innovation Lab	SW Colorado, South Central	Traditional/Gen Business, Non-profit/Community, Work-based/Apprenticeship
Economic Development Council of Colorado	Statewide/Virtual	Non-profit/Community, Sector-Specific

## Entrepreneurial Membership Organizations

Entrepreneurial Membership Organizations are best understood as support platforms rather than structured business development programs. They often complement incubators and accelerators by:

- Building social capital
- Providing ongoing support
- Fostering peer learning
- Elevating visibility
- Offering leadership & personal growth

Entrepreneur Member Organizations	Region	Organization Type
YPO	Statewide	Founder Support
EO/EOA	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Founder Support
Women In Tech (WIT)		Founder Support
Startup Colorado	Statewide	Founder Support, Ecosystem Support
Colorado Startups	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Founder Support
TiE Denver		Founder Support
Bridge Entrepreneur Network (BEN)	Statewide	Founder Support, Ecosystem Support
Colorado CleanTech	Statewide	Founder Support, Professional or Trade Association
Colorado Bioscience Association	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Founder Support, Professional or Trade Association
Colorado Technology Association	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Founder Support, Professional or Trade Association
Endeavor Colorado	I-25 Corridor (FoCo to COS)	Founder Support

## ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT ATTRACTS FUNDING

According to Colorado's own Innosphere Ventures, "Colorado's venture capital scene has demonstrated a resilience that mirrors the state's entrepreneurial spirit. In the face of shifting economic tides, our ecosystem has retained momentum, with 2023 unfolding as a year of strategic growth and focused investment. Key sectors, including technology, healthcare, and cleantech, have continued to attract investors, bolstering the state's reputation as an innovation hub."<sup>19</sup>

Colorado has a vibrant startup ecosystem with multiple accelerator and incubator programs. While specific numbers can fluctuate, generally, our state has 13 accelerators, nine incubators, and numerous venture capital firms and angel networks. These programs provide support and resources for startups, including mentorship, capital, and community building.

FIGURE 12

### Capital Invested X State<sup>20</sup>

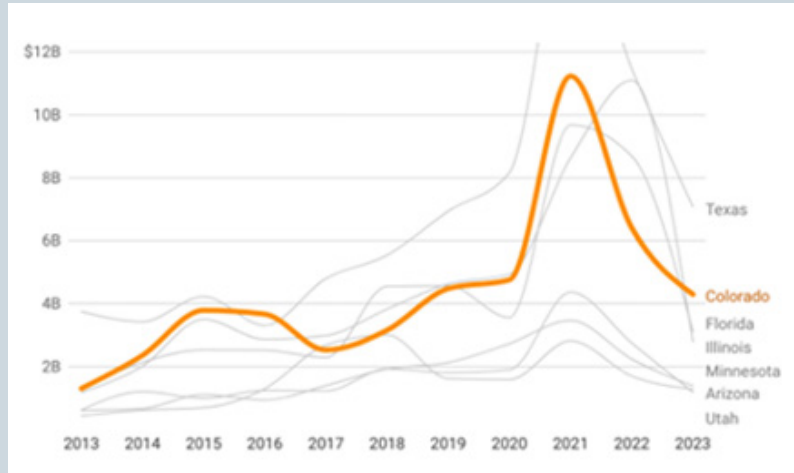


FIGURE 13

### Most Active Colorado VC Investors by Deal Count, 2023<sup>21</sup>

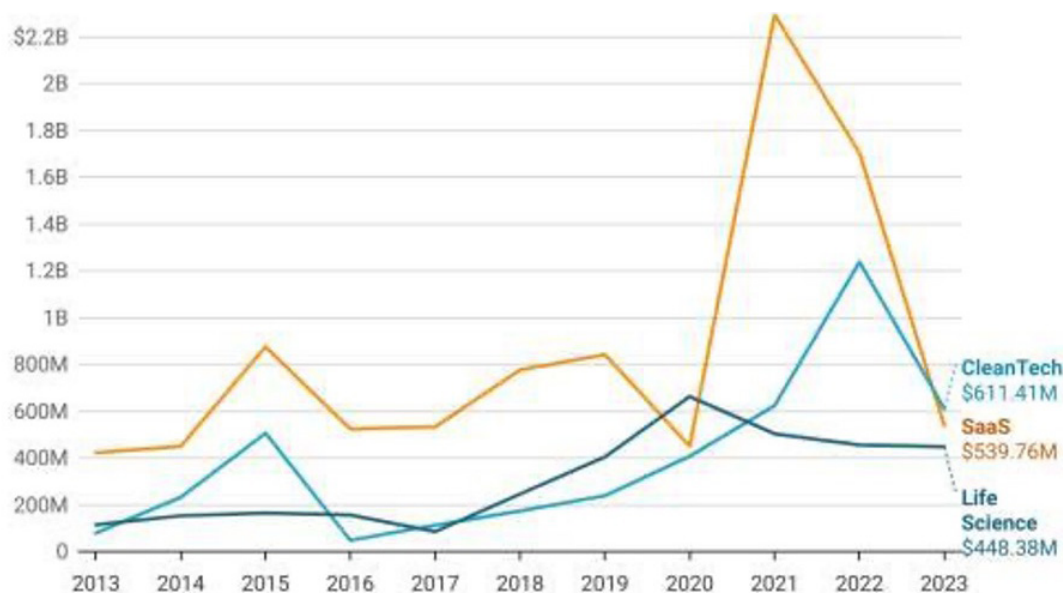
	Investors	Investor HQ City	Investor HQ State	Colorado Deal Count (#)
1	Techstars	Boulder	Colorado	26
2	Service Provider Capital	Vail	Colorado	11
3	Range Ventures	Denver	Colorado	8
4	Denver Angels	Denver	Colorado	7
5	Innosphere Ventures	Fort Collins	Colorado	7
6	Antler	Singapore	Singapore	6
7	Caruso Ventures	Boulder	Colorado	6
8	Access Venture Partners	Westminster	Colorado	5
9	Greater Colorado Venture Fund	Telluride	Colorado	5
10	Plug and Play Tech Center	Sunnyvale	California	5



Dynamism refers to how quickly an economy changes, how efficiently it redeploys its resources to the most productive use, and how successfully it translates experimentation into opportunity. The Economic Innovation Group conducted an Index of State Dynamism in 2021 where Colorado was fourth most dynamic among all states. Colorado’s Venture Capital activity has remained resilient as well. The state has been a top performer in venture capital activity in terms of total volume, consistently. For total capital invested, Colorado has been in the top five states on a per capita and per \$1,000 GDP basis. The state has been in the top ten states in total expenditure invested over the past five years with amounts ranging from \$4.3 billion to \$11.4 billion. Investments in several advanced industries—cleantech, SaaS, and the Life Sciences—lead the way in the state.

FIGURE 14

### Capital Invested X Vertical<sup>22</sup>



Whether along the Front Range or on the Western Slopes, Colorado’s startup ecosystem offers entrepreneurs the resources they need to grow and sustain successful companies.

[Colorado Startup Week](#), founded in 2012, is an annual weeklong event intended to unite Colorado’s entrepreneurial community and celebrate the great companies, innovation and ideas happening in the city and the people and inspiration behind them. The core programming is centered on the entrepreneurial community with an emphasis in technology, design, social entrepreneurship, manufacturing and business. Events include sessions, presentations, panels, workshops, happy hours, social events, job fairs and more.

[West Slope Startup Week](#) is a celebration of everything entrepreneurial in rural Colorado. This free week-long event is a “choose your own adventure” style educational conference for aspiring and established entrepreneurs, small business owners, startup founders, creatives, and makers. 50+ educational sessions are taught by regional entrepreneurs. Session ideas are submitted by the local community members and selected by an objective committee of entrepreneurs.

[Boulder Startup Week](#) is a free conference-style event with sessions at local venues in downtown Boulder that educate attendees and provide professional networking opportunities.

## Income and Earnings

**\$92,911**  $\pm \$1,057$

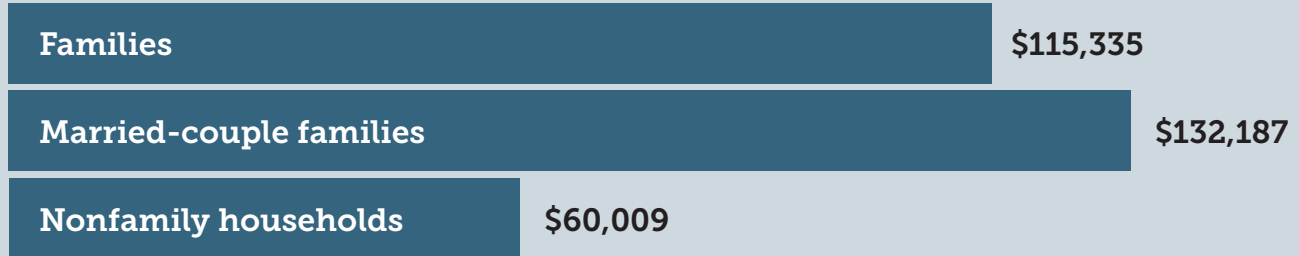
Median Household Income, Colorado

**\$77,719**  $\pm \$186$

Median Household Income, United States

FIGURE 15

### Median Income by Types of Families, Colorado



The Colorado economy has recovered from high inflationary pressures experienced in recent years. The U.S. inflation rate dropped from a high of eight percent in 2022 to three percent as of January 2025. Data into early 2025 shows Colorado's inflation rate is cooling faster than the national average at 2.3 percent in January 2025.

Housing prices are by far the largest driver of overall growth in the state's cost of living. Over the last five years, the state has seen a 48.6 percent increase in housing costs and ranks 41st in affordability.<sup>23</sup> Many efforts at the statewide and regional levels are underway to address the high cost of living and how to ensure all Coloradans can afford a place to live.

*Due to the enactment of Proposition 123 by Colorado's voters in 2022, approximately \$300 million in affordable housing funding is now available. The Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and the Governor's Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) oversee this funding, which is managed by the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA), providing grants and loans to nonprofit agencies, community land trusts, nonprofit and for-profit developers, and local governments.*

Colorado's economy continues to benefit from its growing population, strong labor force, and investment in high-growth industries, making it one of the most dynamic economies in the United States.



# SWOT Analysis

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS. TRANSFORMING CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES.

The SWOT Analysis identifies core strengths, barriers and, ultimately, opportunities for Colorado. The SWOT Analysis was informed both by the regional CEDS developed by the 14 planning and management regions and two Tribal nations, as well as an analysis of statewide trends and patterns.

## SUMMARY

Colorado’s economy is powered by a range of industries, a thriving entrepreneurial spirit, and a highly educated workforce—all set against a backdrop of natural beauty and a lifestyle that draws talent from across the nation and beyond. With growing momentum in tech, energy, tourism, and innovation, the state is uniquely positioned to lead in the next era of growth. To fully unlock this potential, Colorado must address challenges like housing affordability, infrastructure gaps, and rural-urban disparities. By investing in people and places, the state can build a resilient, connected economy that uplifts every community.

### STRENGTHS

- Strong & Diverse Regional Industries
- Tourism and Outdoor Recreation
- High Investment in Workforce Development
- Attractive Quality of Life
- Strong Entrepreneurial & Innovation Climate
- Strong Energy Potential
- Geographic Location
- Strong Government Infrastructure

### WEAKNESSES

- Affordability & Availability of Housing
- High Cost of Living
- Inconsistent Access to Infrastructure
- Economic Disparities Between Urban and Rural Areas
- K-12 & Higher Education Funding
- Fiscal Constraints
- Lack of Demographic Diversity

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Tech Sector and Innovation Expansion
- Expanding Tourism and Outdoor Recreation
- Migration Trends Favoring Colorado Lifestyle
- Capitalize on Growing Energy Capacity
- Innovation in Education
- Expand on Strong Entrepreneurship & Business Expansion Initiatives
- Optimize Passenger and Freight Rail System

### THREATS

- Natural and Human-Caused Disasters & Resource Limitations
- Economic Downturns
- Increases in Housing Costs
- Increases Cost of Living
- Challenges Supporting Population Growth/Changes
- Job Creation & Workforce Attraction in Rural Regions
- Rising Unemployment and Slowing Job Growth
- Potential Loss of Major Employers
- Increasing Economic Development Spending in Other States
- Community Support Service Shortages

# STRENGTHS

## Strong & Diverse Regional Industries

Leading industries across the state include everything from agriculture, manufacturing and energy; to financial services and healthcare; to technology, aerospace, and the military.

## Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

A cornerstone of Colorado’s brand, the state boasts breathtaking natural beauty, abundant outdoor recreation and cultural opportunities, more than eight million acres of public lands, and a nationally recognized commitment to protecting and preserving its natural resources.

## High Investment in Workforce Development

Colorado has built a strong higher education system and is making significant contributions in upskilling and reskilling through new apprenticeship and training programs, which are creating new employment opportunities for Coloradans.

OPPORTUNITY NOW COLORADO

*An \$92 million grant program seeking innovative solutions to meet Colorado’s workforce needs through industry and education collaboration, training Coloradans for 20,000 in-demand, high-wage jobs and careers.*

WORKFORCE INNOVATION & OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA) STATE PLAN

*A 4-year program (2024-2027) helping workers prepare for employment, find and keep a job, and increase their earnings through a federally funded program.*

## Attractive Quality of Life

With vibrant small towns and cities, rich cultural amenities, abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, healthy and active residents, and a range of lifestyle opportunities, the state has strong appeal as a place to live and work.

## Strong Entrepreneurial & Innovation Climate

Over recent years, the state has built a powerful entrepreneurial ecosystem, with a stable tax environment, a collaborative business culture, and a strong support network of venture capitalists, incubators, and accelerators.

QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY GRANT

*In 2024, Colorado was designated as a TechHub and won \$40.5 million quantum technology grant from the U.S. EDA—which also unlocked \$74 million in state tax credits—to help turn the state into a worldwide hub in quantum computing.*

## Historically Strong Job Growth

The past decade has seen growth in Colorado’s employment base and close to full employment, including in attractive, high-paying industries.



## Strong Energy Potential

Colorado has a breadth of energy resources and opportunities, with both abundant oil and gas reserves and significant renewable energy resources (wind, solar, battery storage, and geothermal). As a result, Colorado’s energy costs are below national average, with Colorado ranking fifth in household energy affordability across the country.<sup>24</sup>

OIL & GAS LEADERSHIP	INVESTMENTS IN RENEWABLES
<i>In 2023, Colorado ranked fourth in oil production and eighth in natural gas production.</i>	<i>In 2023, renewable sources of energy accounted for 39 percent of Colorado’s total in-state electricity generation and our state ranks fourth nationally in cleantech employment, with nearly 2,100 companies. The Colorado-Wyoming Resilience Engine offers startup and accelerator programs for climate technology innovation.</i>

## Geographic Location

Colorado’s domestic and international connectivity via DEN and regional airports, along with its presence as an East/West corridor for transportation and logistics, establishes the state as the hub of the Mountain West.

DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (DEN)
<i>In 2024, DEN was ranked the third busiest airport in the U.S. and the sixth busiest in the world.<sup>25</sup></i>

## Strong Government Infrastructure

In recent years, the state government has established itself as a leader in effective governance, with a focus on innovation, accountability and support for the state’s economic growth. The Colorado Association of Regional Organizations (CARO) ensures economic development throughout every region of the state.

## WEAKNESSES

### Affordability & Availability of Housing

Colorado’s growing population and limited housing supply have led to a statewide shortage, compounded by challenges in building diversified housing—particularly condominiums and townhomes that could offer more affordable options.

### High Cost of Living

Recent periods of inflation, combined with rising income inequality, have created an environment where the cost of groceries, healthcare, childcare and other goods and services are putting a major burden on Colorado’s workforce and residents.

### Inconsistent Access to Infrastructure

Colorado is facing challenges with traffic congestion, road maintenance, public transportation, broadband access, and water and energy infrastructure necessary to support growing industries.

## Economic Disparities Between Urban and Rural Areas

Rural areas of Colorado face unique challenges in terms of business attraction, lack of industry diversity, labor availability, presence of high wage jobs, poverty, quality of education and training, access to healthcare services, and insufficient or worn out physical infrastructure.

## K-12 & Higher Education Funding

Colorado’s K-12 and post-secondary education systems face challenges, including teacher shortages, below-average graduation rates, and low per-pupil spending—limiting the state’s ability to support a highly trained workforce.

## Fiscal Constraints

The Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR), passed in 1992, caps the amount of revenue the State of Colorado can retain and invest in state programs and services. This can create budgetary restrictions or shortfalls, particularly when costs increase faster than the TABOR limit.

# OPPORTUNITIES

## Tech Sector and Innovation Expansion

Building off of its strong technological base, Colorado is well-positioned for growth in critical emerging technologies like quantum computing, cleantech, AI, software development, and cybersecurity, along with aerospace and defense technology. Providing access to capital, business support services like SBDCs, and incubator and accelerator programs can help facilitate this expansion.

CHIPS ZONES PROGRAM	COLORADO QUANTUM FUND
<i>In 2023, Colorado created this program to maximize incentives available to eligible semiconductor companies operating within the state.</i>	<i>In 2024, the General Assembly passed \$74M in tax credits to support the quantum computing ecosystem in Colorado. The Colorado Quantum Fund will promote the expansion of translational research and provide increased access to capital for quantum companies.</i>

## Expanding Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Tourism is a four-season opportunity for Colorado, spanning to all four corners of the state. A growing arts, culture and culinary scene compliments Colorado’s renowned outdoor recreational offerings, providing the opportunity to attract a variety of industries, including sports performance and outdoor gear.

TOURISM POWERHOUSE
<i>In 2023, the tourism industry saw record-breaking success, with 93 million visitors and \$27.7 billion in traveler spending, which generated \$1.7 billion in state and local tax revenue.<sup>26</sup></i>

## Migration Trends Favoring Colorado Lifestyle

Colorado’s lifestyle is attractive, especially to younger generations, and many workers are leaving expensive coastal states for the state’s quality of life and relative affordability.



## Capitalize on Growing Energy Capacity

With its ample sunshine, wind and investments in advanced technologies, Colorado has a unique opportunity to grow its energy capacity, transition to modern efficient/electrified manufacturing, support reduced energy cost volatility, and help transition workers to new industries as coal-fired power plants are retired.

### OFFICE OF JUST TRANSITION

---

*A program to assist communities and workers transitioning away from the mining and burning of coal as an energy source. For example, in 2024 Craig and Moffat Counties were awarded a \$70 million model Community Assistance Package to support such a transition.*

## Innovation in Education

Colorado can further develop its workforce by creating public / private collaboration in workforce development, including youth vocational training, college, and university partnerships for advanced technology education.

## Expand on Strong Entrepreneurship & Business Expansion Initiatives

With an attractive quality of life and a supportive business climate and entrepreneurship ecosystem—including a stable tax code and low income and property taxes—Colorado has the ability to continue to expand new businesses and capital.

## Optimize Passenger and Freight Rail System

Opportunity to utilize existing rail infrastructure that is under utilized due to coal plant closures and diminished freight traffic to service the growing demand for transportation both in the front range and to our some of our most popular tourism destinations of Eldora ski mountain, Winter Park Resorts, and Granby. Continuing to expand passenger rail to support the tourism and workforce community, while optimizing freight rail to support business attraction and retention.

## THREATS

### Natural and Human-Caused Disasters & Resource Limitations

Colorado faces both increasing risks of natural and human-caused disasters like wildfire and drought, along with impacts such as water constraints and shortened ski seasons.

### INCREASING WILDFIRE RISK

---

*Four of the top five and nine of the top 20 largest wildfires in Colorado have occurred within the last seven years (2018 and 2020).*

*Colorado has faced near-constant drought since 2000, with climate change and growing demand increasing uncertainty around the state's water supply. Reduced snowpack, earlier snowmelt, and rising drought-related damages—projected to reach \$830 million annually by 2050—pose significant challenges for the future.<sup>27</sup>*

## Economic Downturns

Recent years have highlighted the influence of outside forces on Colorado’s economy, such as the global pandemic, requiring the state to navigate potential downturns and resulting impacts on its businesses and workforce.

## Increases in Housing Costs

Ongoing growth in the state, combined with limited housing supply and increases in construction, development and maintenance costs may exacerbate Colorado’s increasing housing costs.

## Increases in Cost of Living

Continued inflation and changes in federal policy, including the potential impacts of tariffs, can place additional stress on the state’s workforce, particularly its working- and middle-class citizens, and lure businesses away from Colorado.

## Challenges Supporting Population Growth / Changes

Though long-term population growth in the state is expected to slow, the state will likely continue to outpace the national average, increasing demand on resources and infrastructure. At the same time, rising retirements could lead to workforce shortages and business closures, particularly where succession planning is lacking.

## Job Creation & Workforce Attraction in Rural Regions

Colorado’s rural communities face unique challenges, including dependence on one or two industries, major economic shifts (e.g., coal), a lack of rural broadband and other infrastructure, movement of the younger population to metro areas, and shortages of skilled workers.

## Rising Unemployment and Slowing Job Growth

Colorado’s unemployment rate has steadily increased in recent years, and the state now sits just above the national average. This reversal from pre-COVID trends, where Colorado consistently outperformed the U.S., signals a growing concern for job growth and economic stability, particularly as the state moves to counter national labor market trends.

## Potential Loss of Major Employers

While Colorado’s economy is more diversified than in the past—it is home to 10 Fortune 500 companies, along with many others that are critical to the economy in their region of the state—continuing to attract and retain major employers will be important to maintaining a strong economy.

## Increasing Economic Development Spending in Other States

Other states are ramping up economic development spending, creating increased competition for business attraction, expansion, and tourism—posing a threat to Colorado’s ability to retain and grow its economic base.

### STATE COMPARISON

*Illinois doubled private sector investments from \$6.3 billion in 2023 to \$12.5 billion in 2024 through state incentive programs.*

## Community Support Services Shortages

Continued shortages in professions such as teachers, childcare workers, and healthcare providers - and other wraparound services - would put additional stress on the state’s workforce and employers.

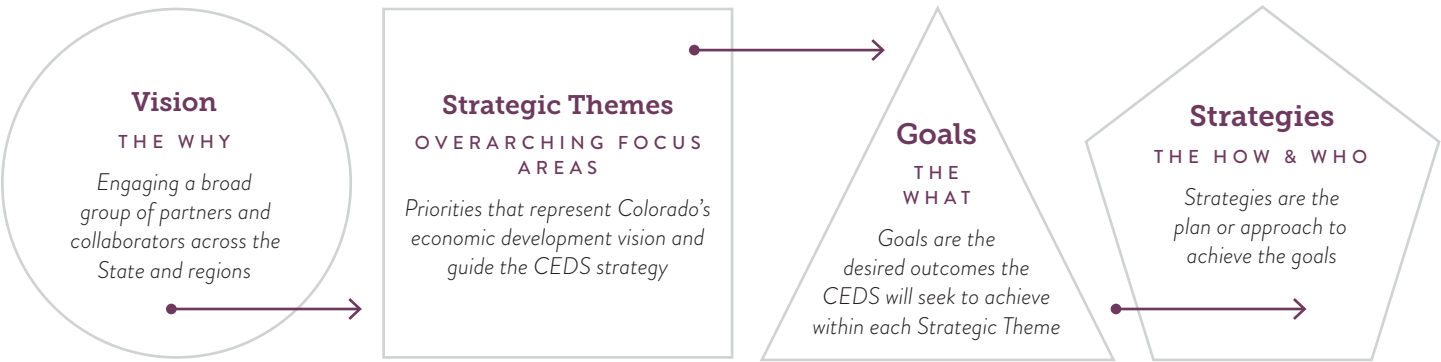


# Strategic Direction

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR REGIONS

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The strategic direction and action plans are informed by the findings of the SWOT analysis. All elements of this framework were co-created, reviewed and approved by all collaborators noted in the Approach section of this document.



## VISION

The CEDS strategic vision celebrates the strengths and potential of Colorado's regions, while recognizing key areas that Colorado must continue to prioritize in order to unlock economic potential across the state.

### Colorado's Economic Development Vision

We envision a dynamic, vibrant economy that honors the unique strengths of our 14 planning and management regions and two Tribal nations. When we foster thriving industries, great jobs, attainable housing, and strong infrastructure, we can drive growth and innovation, enhance quality of life for Coloradans, and attract talent, businesses, investments, and visitors from around the world.

When We Say...	...We Mean
Dynamic	an economy characterized by continuous productive change, innovation, and adaptation—rather than remaining static—demonstrates resilience through its capacity to grow and respond effectively to shifting conditions
Vibrant	a thriving economy, characterized by innovation, growth, and opportunity for all
Thriving Industries	strategic growth industries across the state, and potential high-growth industries
Great Jobs	jobs that meets the needs of workers, job seekers, and employers
Attainable Housing	housing for every budget
Infrastructure	physical infrastructure (roads, transportation/transit, broadband, utilities, water, etc.) and community services (childcare, healthcare, mental health, etc.)

## STRATEGIC THEMES, GOALS, STRATEGIES

The strategic themes represent the key priority areas for Colorado. They were informed by the regional CEDS, as well as key statewide goals and priorities. Each theme is supported by key goals to help achieve a desired outcome that supports the vision.

### Housing



#### GOAL ONE

*Support the creation of and access to different types of housing options that meet the needs of each region's workforce and residents.*

### Job Creation + Business Development



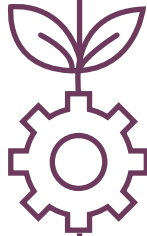
#### GOAL TWO

*Support the attraction, retention and training of an adaptable, skilled talent pool.*

#### GOAL THREE

*Support business creation, expansion, retention and recruitment to strengthen regional economies and generate job growth.*

### Growing Key Industries



#### GOAL FOUR

*Enable and support the growth and development of existing state and regional target industries.*

#### GOAL FIVE

*Encourage diversified and emerging industries to drive economic growth.*

### Quality of Life + Tourism



#### GOAL SIX

*Support the revitalization and development of vibrant, livable communities.*

#### GOAL SEVEN

*Continue to responsibly steward and strengthen the state's robust tourism/travel, outdoor recreation and arts/creative industries*

#### GOAL EIGHT

*Protect and provide access to all our natural resources and expand the state's ability to respond to natural disasters and other disruptions and mitigate their impacts.*

### Community Infrastructure + Resources



#### GOAL NINE

*Support strategic infrastructure investments that save money, enhance broadband connectivity, mobility, transportation, job growth, business development and quality of life.*

#### GOAL TEN

*Enable and increase access to community services (e.g., childcare, education, healthcare, mental health, and resources for people of all ages and abilities).*

This section includes an overview of each of the Strategic Themes, as well as the goals and strategies that support them. This Statewide CEDS sets broad, flexible goals and strategies that empower each region to tailor actions to its unique needs—ensuring local priorities lead the way in driving meaningful, lasting impact.

# HOUSING

## DESIRED OUTCOME

A housing market that reflects the unique needs of its regions, strengthening communities, and driving long-term economic resilience – with a range of attainable housing options for Coloradans of all budgets, near work, commerce, and transit.

Strong economic development goes hand in hand with the development of attainable housing, and housing is noted as a key priority for every one of Colorado’s regions. The state is facing a statewide housing shortage and lack of affordability that impact economic mobility, business growth, and workforce stability. The 2024 median home price was \$606,800, requiring an income of over \$127,000 to afford a starter home in some areas. At the same time, over 32 percent of households are considered cost-burdened—spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, despite the number of total housing units increasing by over 15 percent over the last 10 years, and modest population and household growth, housing construction has still not kept pace with the persistent demand.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the existing housing stock, particularly in rural and distressed areas, often falls short in terms of livability and desirability. Furthermore, the shortage across all housing levels—including a lack of entry-level homes and suitable options for retirees—contributes significantly. This scarcity of starter homes prevents younger generations from entering the market; at the same time, some older adults are interested in downsizing/rightsizing, but the lack of age friendly units is prohibitive. Others want to age in the homes they’ve lived in for years. Regardless, there are not enough units to support the needs of Coloradans.

In November 2022, Colorado voters passed Proposition 123, a ballot measure authorizing the state to retain money from existing state tax revenue to support affordable housing investment.<sup>30</sup> These funds are split 60/40 between the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) and the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) through its Division of Housing (DOH), respectively. OEDIT manages the Affordable Housing Financing Fund, in partnership with Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA), which serves as Contract Administrator. DOH manages the Affordable Housing Support Fund.

High housing costs and low attainability make it increasingly difficult for employers to attract and retain talent, while residents are being pushed farther from their workplaces, increasing commute times and placing additional stress on transportation systems. To address this, legislation has been passed in the state expanding efforts to encourage transit-oriented development (TOD), particularly in metro regions, ensuring new units are developed in alignment with workforce and employer needs, in locations that reduce reliance on long commutes and improve quality of life.<sup>31</sup> The legislature has also advanced to support accessory dwelling units (ADUs)—smaller homes located on the same property as existing residences—as a flexible, lower-cost option to increase housing supply in urban and suburban areas.

To preserve Colorado’s economic competitiveness and ensure that its communities remain livable and resilient, it is critical that the state continues to invest in housing policies and development strategies that expand the supply of attainable, well-located, and varied housing options for all income levels.



## HOUSING AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BARRIER (REGION 1)

*In a survey of residents in Northeast Colorado Counties (Logan, Morgan, Philips, Sedgwick, Washington, Yuma), most of the respondents indicated that the lack of housing for the workforce was identified as the most significant barrier to economic development in Northeast Colorado.*

## MIND THE GAP (REGION 10)

*A 2023 housing study of the Colorado's Western Slope Counties of Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel found that compared to what is designated as "affordable" by CHFA for a three person household, observed rents and purchase price are out of reach for families making 100 percent AMI, with the median single-family home sales price in 2022 being more than double this estimated affordable range in Gunnison, Ouray and San Miguel Counties.*

## ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Support the creation of and access to different types of housing options that meet the needs of each region's workforce and all residents

Strategies	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	Timing
Partner with state and local partners, housing authorities, municipalities, philanthropic agencies, industry partners, and developers to create attainable housing options for both homeowners and renters	OEDIT, DOLA	CHFA CEO CO Align Housing Colorado Regional/Local Housing authorities Local governments/ municipalities Downtown Colorado Inc., Middle Income Housing Authority Regional housing coalitions Nonprofit and philanthropic partners Private developers Mission-aligned investors Utilities	On-going
Leverage and align existing federal, state and local funding and improve program flexibility to increase local housing supply and capacity			On-going
Support and grow the offsite (manufactured/modular), innovative building industry in Colorado to produce more attainable, efficient and affordable homes			On-going
Support energy efficient and multi-modal access (walkability and transit oriented) for all housing developments with medium and high density			On-going

## JOB CREATION + BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

### DESIRED OUTCOME

Thriving and diverse regional economies across the entire State of Colorado provide sustainable job growth, a skilled and adaptable workforce, and a strong, supportive environment for business development and investment.

The state's economy continues to show strong performance in job creation and business development, supported by a highly educated workforce and high labor force participation. As of April 2024, Colorado's labor force participation rate reached 67.7 percent, the fifth highest in the nation—compared to the national average of 62.7 percent.<sup>32</sup> Job growth has rebounded strongly post-pandemic, with a revised 2.5 percent annual growth rate in early 2024, placing Colorado 11th among states for average annual job growth.<sup>33</sup>

Colorado's growing, innovation-driven economy is anchored by sectors like technology, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and renewable energy. Professional and business services, health care, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and construction account for about 60 percent of employment, though they generate only 35 percent of total GDP. In contrast, the finance, insurance, and real estate sector contributes nearly 20 percent of the state's GDP while employing a smaller share of the workforce.<sup>34</sup> With nearly 45 percent of adults holding a bachelor's degree or higher—well above the national average of 35 percent—Colorado has the talent pool to support continued economic expansion.<sup>35</sup>

Colorado's economy is bolstered by significant global investment, with 126,600 workers employed as a result of international companies operating within the state. Notably, 39,200 of these jobs are in the manufacturing sector, highlighting the state's appeal to foreign investors in diverse industries. Overall, Colorado is home to 1,043 international companies, underscoring its role as a key player in the global market.<sup>36</sup>

Entrepreneurship and business development remain core strengths. Colorado ranked first in the nation for business application growth in 2023, with a 156 percent increase year-over-year.<sup>37</sup> The state also consistently ranks among the top five for venture capital investment per capita and per \$1,000 of GDP, with total investments ranging from \$4.2 billion to \$11.4 billion over the past five years.<sup>38</sup> As a result, Colorado ranks fourth nationally in economic dynamism, reflecting its ability to rapidly adapt and convert innovation into economic opportunity.<sup>39</sup>

Small businesses are the dominant share of business in Colorado, with nearly 685,000 entities representing 99.5 percent of Colorado businesses and employing 47.3 percent of the state's workers.<sup>40</sup> But despite the significant level of entrepreneurial investment in the state overall, access to capital remains limited for these small companies, particularly in smaller communities and those run by underserved populations.

## GLOBAL ATTRACTION

Facilitated through the Opportunity Now Program, in April 2025, OEDIT announced that Swisspod, a company pioneering high-speed, emission-free Hyperloop transportation, is expanding in Colorado Springs. This is in addition to Swisspod's test track, which is located in Pueblo.



FIGURE 16

### About Opportunity Now

#### OPPORTUNITY NOW REGIONAL TALENT SUMMITS

Facilitated through the Opportunity Now Program, the Regional Talent Summits bring together state and regional partners to develop tactical workforce plans that address regional labor shortages through industry-led discussions. Seven Regional Hosts and one Program Facilitator are guiding this effort, with summits taking place in early 2025 and resulting plans and progress tracked annually through 2030 in the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report.

## CYBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (REGION 4)

Colorado Cybersecurity for Small Business Program – the region received a \$927,000 grant from the Small Business Administration for the development of the Colorado Cybersecurity for Small Business Program to support a cyber assistance program, provide hands on training of cyber professionals and teachers, and provide certifications to increase employability of students and graduates.



## ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 2: Support the attraction, retention and training of an adaptable, skilled talent pool.

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Partner with education and training programs across the state to cultivate homegrown talent and attract skilled workers in alignment with regional and state industry needs	OEDIT (Talent Innovation), CDLE, CWDC	Intermediaries, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Colorado Department of Education (CDE), Colorado Community College System (CCCS), Colorado Career and Technical Education (CTE), Sector partnerships, local workforce boards	On-going
Collaborate to expand industry-led talent development through registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and other types of work-based learning	OEDIT (Talent Innovation, Apprenticeship Colorado, CDLE, CWDC	Intermediaries, Apprenticeship Colorado, OIT (CO Broadband Office), Colorado Energy Office (CEO), Select Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), Colorado Career and Technical Education (CTE), Sector partnerships, Industry Associations	On-going
Support employers through talent development initiatives to incentivize skills training aligned with industry needs	OEDIT (Talent Innovation, BF&I, GBD), CDLE, CWDC	Intermediaries, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Sector partnerships, local workforce boards, Industry Associations	On-going

Goal 3: Support business creation, expansion, retention and recruitment to strengthen regional economies and generate job growth

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Partner with regional and local economic development/talent partners to expand business recruitment and create programs for job creation and retention	OEDIT (Talent Innovation, BF&I, GBD)	Regional Economic Development partners, Higher Ed partners, Corporate Consortium, DOLA (Rural Economic Development Initiative), CDLE Workforce Consortium	On-going
Provide robust support for small businesses and entrepreneurs including advisory services and mentorship, technical assistance, continuity/resilience planning, exit planning, etc.	OEDIT (SBDC, MBO, EO, BF&I)	SBDC, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for specific focus areas, Advisor Network, DOLA (Colorado Resiliency Office)	On-going

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Support small businesses and entrepreneurs with a continuum of access to capital programs and partners that target market gaps	OEDIT (BF&I, GBD, SBDC, MBO, EO)	Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA), Mission-Based Lenders (CDFIs, revolving loan funds, banks), Venture Capital	On-going
Attract more U.S. and global companies to Colorado, and help them find the talent and innovation resources they need to be successful	OEDIT (Talent Innovation, GBD, BF&I)	Intermediaries, select IHEs, Ecosystem partners, chambers, EQ, Ascend, CDLE	On-going
Strengthen business development by optimizing efficient and innovative supply chain and advanced manufacturing capabilities	OEDIT (GBD, BF&I, SBDC)	Colorado Advanced Manufacturing Association, Manufacturers Edge, Elevate Quantum, NSF Engines, NoCo Manufacturing Partnership (NOCOM), Women in Manufacturing, Warehouse Business Accelerator, etc.	On-going
Retain businesses through innovative programs like employee-ownership transition models	OEDIT (EO, SBDC, BF&I)	Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center (RMEOC), Center for Community Wealth Building (CCWB), University of Colorado, University of Denver, Chambers, Regional Economic Development Districts (EDDs), Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Rocky Mountain ESOP Association Chapter, Exit Planning Institute, CDLE, local workforce centers, etc.	On-going
Expand and strengthen online educational resources available to businesses	OEDIT	Other State Agencies, School Districts, Rocky Mountain Governmental Purchasing Association (RMGPA), Library Districts, Local Workforce Boards	On-going

# GROWING KEY INDUSTRIES

## DESIRED OUTCOME

A thriving economy, strengthened by both established and emerging industries across the state and its regions, that support business growth, expand job opportunities and position Colorado for long-term success.

Colorado’s economy is fueled by a broad set of strategic industries that drive innovation, employment, and long-term growth across the state. Leading sectors include aerospace, where Colorado holds the highest concentration of aerospace jobs per capita in the U.S., and energy.<sup>41</sup> While wind energy jobs are projected to grow by 60 percent through 2033, the state also maintains a strong presence in non-renewable energy production—oil and gas continue to play a major role, especially in energy-rich regions, and the state ranked fourth in oil production and eighth in natural gas production in 2023.<sup>42</sup> Technology and advanced manufacturing are fast-growing sectors, supported by investments in innovation areas like quantum computing, where Colorado is emerging as a national leader.<sup>43</sup>

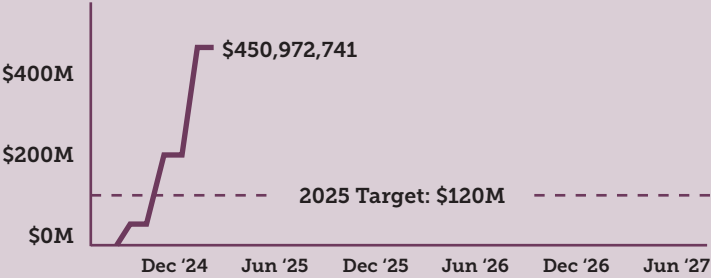
Agriculture and agribusiness are foundational to the state’s economy, particularly in rural areas and the Eastern Plains, where crop production, livestock, food processing, and supply chain services drive significant economic activity, generating \$47 billion annually in economic activity.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, tourism and outdoor recreation are vital statewide, generating over \$37 billion in consumer spending annually and contributing more than 511,000 direct jobs, and supporting jobs and small businesses in both urban centers and mountain communities.<sup>45</sup>

To maintain its competitive edge and expand business development and job creation, Colorado must continue to support the growth of these core industries. At the same time, it is essential to explore and nurture emerging sectors—such as artificial intelligence—to further diversify the state’s economy. By balancing industry expansion with innovation, Colorado can create more pathways to economic opportunity across all regions.

### A WILDLY IMPORTANT GOAL (WIG)

To ensure that Colorado remains a national leader in advanced industries, and position the state to expand further into emerging and innovative and knowledge intensive markets, Governor Polis has set a goal for the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) to bring in \$200 million in federal and private investment into the state, to support Colorado’s knowledge intensive and innovation ecosystems by June 30, 2027.

FIGURE 17  
State Investment in Innovation





## COLORADO'S ROLE IN A 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

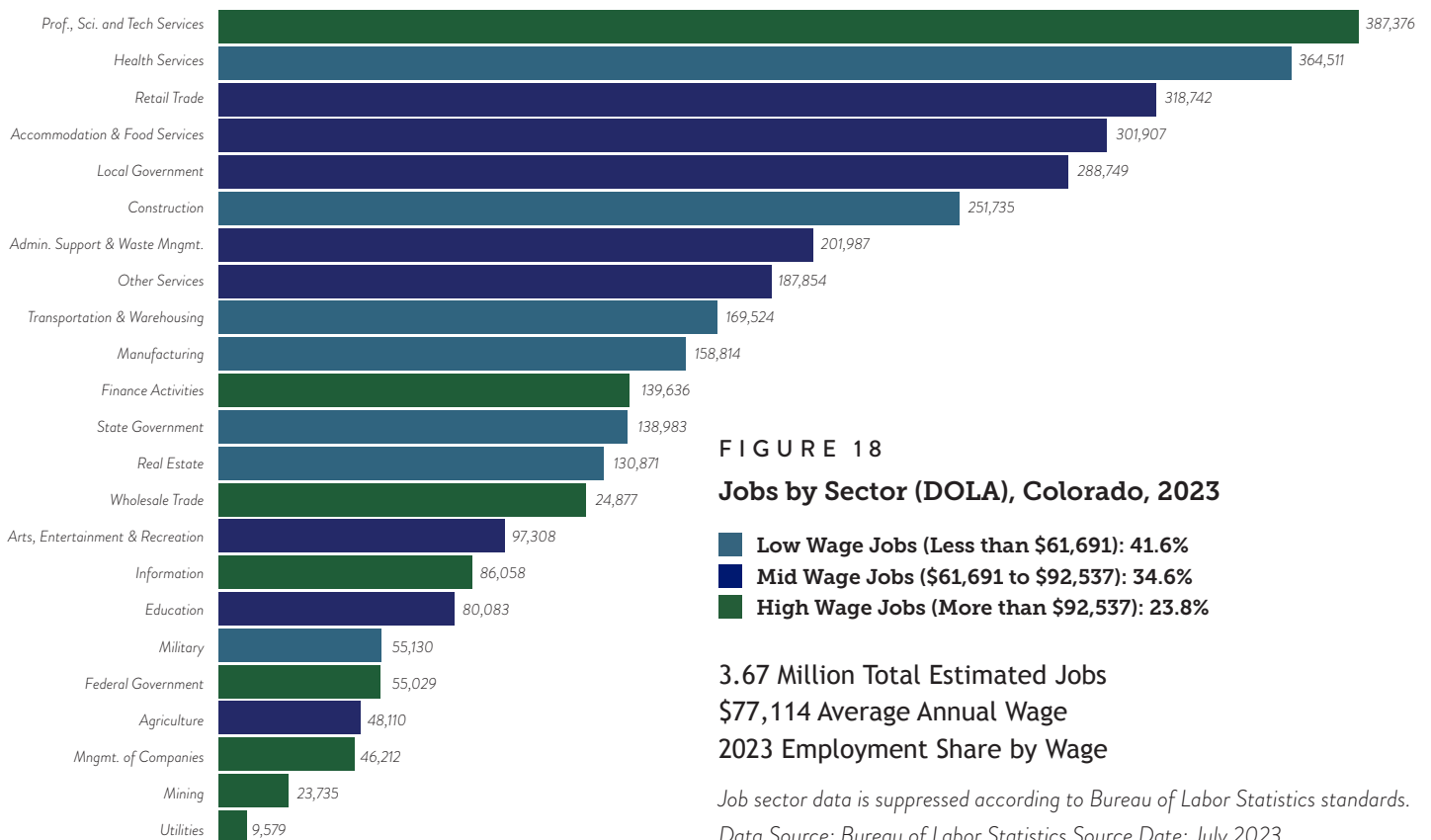
In July of 2024, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) selected the Mountain West's application as one of 12 federally designated Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs) under the CHIPS and Science Act. After being designated as a hub in October 2024, the Elevate Quantum coalition—a consortium of private and public sector organizations, academic institutions and nonprofits across Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming—was selected for Phase 2 Funding, positioning Colorado's quantum ecosystem for up to \$900M in funding from this program alone.

## ADVANCED INDUSTRIES ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

The Advanced Industries Accelerator (AIA) Program was created in 2013 to promote growth and sustainability in Colorado's advanced industries. Non-dilutive funding is awarded to Colorado research institutions, companies, and nonprofit organizations to develop innovative and disruptive technologies. Since its inception the program has created and retained over 11,000 jobs and has leveraged \$3.4B in third-party capital back into the state.

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO DIVERSIFY TARGET INDUSTRIES

In Region 10, the City of Montrose and Montrose County are working with Colorado Outdoors, a development company whose main purpose is to create an ideal location for business relocation, workforce housing, and large community parks along the Uncompahgre River corridor, to economically diversify the area with an emphasis on the manufacturing, tourism, and outdoor industry sectors.



## ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 4: Enable and support the growth and development of existing state and regional target industries

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Strengthen coordination across economic development and workforce development in support of regional economic priorities	OEDIT (ROO)	OEDIT, CARO, Regional Economic Development Districts (EDDs), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), EDCC, CO I Align, sector partnerships, CWDC	On-going
Leverage and track advanced industries investments	OEDIT (GBD + BF&I)		On-going

Goal 5: Encourage diversified and emerging industries to drive economic growth

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Promote a modernized, resilient energy ecosystem by advancing a wide range of energy workforce opportunities	Colorado Energy Office (CEO)	OEDIT, DOLA (Resiliency Office), CWDC, CDOT, DNR, CDA	On-going
Work with regional and local partners to explore opportunities to diversify current regional industries/sector focus	OEDIT (Data/ Analytics)	OEDIT, DOLA	On-going
Cultivate new industry ecosystems and work with rural communities to take advantage of opportunities arising in emerging industries (for instance: industry advancements in clean energy, quantum, automation and technological advancement in agriculture, etc.)	OEDIT (GBD)	OEDIT, Department of Agriculture, CARO, Regional Economic Development Districts (EDDs), DOLA, Universities, CO-WY ASCEND Engine, EDCC, TechHubs/Quantum	On-going

## QUALITY OF LIFE + TOURISM

### DESIRED OUTCOME

Colorado builds on its existing status as a premier state to reside in and to visit, with ever more vibrant communities, an epic natural environment, expanded outdoor recreation opportunities, and a growing year-round tourism base.

Colorado's quality of life, outdoor recreation options, and natural resources have always been a core foundation of the state's economic development, attracting tourists both domestically and internationally, retaining and drawing new businesses to the state, and helping to bolster the workforce via in-migration. In 2023, outdoor recreation alone generated \$17.2 billion, marking a 24 percent increase from the previous year and accounting for 3.2 percent of the state's economy. This sector supported 132,500 jobs, representing 4.3 percent of Colorado's employment.<sup>46</sup> The broader tourism industry also saw record-breaking success, with \$28.2 billion in traveler spending in 2023, which generated \$1.8 billion in state and local tax revenue. Direct travel-generated employment grew from 178,260 in 2022 to 187,710 in 2023. Approximately 9,450 jobs were generated, representing a 5.3 percent increase compared to the previous year.<sup>47</sup>

The state is especially well known for skiing and snowboarding in its 32 ski resorts, as well as recreational activities in its four national parks and 43 state parks, offering year-round activities including hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing. And we have experienced significant recent wins with new cultural attractions such as the launch of the Outside Festival and the announced move of the Sundance Film Festival to Boulder.

Across all regions of the state, vibrant downtowns and community centers are essential engines of local economies and tourism, yielding significant economic and cultural benefits. In downtown Denver, for example, there has been a 20 percent increase in high-tech jobs, accompanied by ongoing growth in residential, retail, and cultural assets.<sup>48</sup> Creating live/work spaces helps Coloradans thrive while supporting an important sector of the State's economy. The creative industries make up 3.7 percent of the workforce, supporting 121,228 jobs and contributing \$19.7 billion to Colorado's economy. Arts contribute to its culture and a strong community, and when artists and individuals working in the creative industries have access to affordable live/work spaces they are more likely to thrive. A survey of residents in Artspace buildings across the country showed that 68 percent produced more work after relocating, 76 percent felt more secure about their housing, and 42 percent could save and plan for their future.<sup>49</sup> In Grand Junction, the nonprofit arts and culture sector generated \$28.5 million in direct economic activity in 2022, supporting 552 jobs and contributing over \$1.6 million in local and state tax revenue.<sup>50</sup>

Yet opportunities remain: further enhancing the character and vibrancy of Colorado's communities, expanding tourism in communities that want it most, supporting jobs in the industry, and protecting the state's natural resources, including mitigating the effects of natural disasters.



## RECENT WIN: SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL<sup>56</sup>

*In early 2025, it was announced that the City of Boulder will be the future home Sundance Film Festival. Creative events and industries like these have a profound impact on quality of life, tourism, and economic development. For example, the 2024 festival in Utah generated \$132 million in gross domestic product, created over 1,700 jobs paying \$70 million in wages, and generated almost \$14 million in state and local tax revenue.*

## OUTSIDE FESTIVAL

*Organized by Outside Interactive, Inc. in partnership with the State of Colorado and Visit Denver, the Outside Festival is an outdoor-focused event held in Denver's Civic Center Park, showcasing live music, adventure films, speakers, and gear. The festival aims to educate and inspire people to engage with the outdoors.*

## ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

### Goal 6: Support the revitalization and development of vibrant, livable communities

Strategies	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	Timing
Activate downtowns, main streets, locally-designated transit and neighborhood centers to improve business communities and quality of life	Multiple, depending on region	DOLA (Main Street Program, EIAF, CDO), CDOT, Downtown Colorado Inc.	On-going
Support and enhance community character of Colorado's unique and individualistic cities and towns	Multiple, depending on region	DOLA (Main Street Program, EIAF, REDI), Downtown Colorado Inc.	On-going
Preserve, develop and promote cultural sites, artistic attractions and community amenities	OEDIT (CCI)	OEDIT (CCI)	On-going
Enhance continuity/preparedness planning and capacity in Colorado communities through regional collaboration and engagement	Multiple, depending on region	Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM), DOLA—Colorado Resiliency Office, CDHS, Colorado Commission on Aging	On-going

Goal 7: Continue to responsibly steward and strengthen the state's robust tourism/travel, outdoor recreation and arts/creative industries.

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Advance Colorado's competitive position as a leading, multi-season destination and drive economic impact through investment in domestic and international destination promotion and brand development	OEDIT (CTO)	DEN	On-going
Elevate Colorado's outdoor industry through investment in outdoor recreation and activities that differentiate the state and drive economic development	OEDIT (OREC)	OEDIT (CTO), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	On-going
Prioritize arts and culture through investment in initiatives that strengthen Colorado's leadership in arts and culture and drive economic development	OEDIT (CCI, Film, CTO)		On-going
Advance inclusiveness and pursue ways that Colorado can share a welcoming experience for all travelers	OEDIT (CTO)	Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), National Park Service (NPS), Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), OEDIT (OREC), Local governments, DEN	On-going
Provide impactful, valuable support for tourism industry partners and destinations to balance varied needs and strengthen local tourism economies	OEDIT (CTO)	DOLA, Statewide industry associations, Colorado Energy Office (CEO), Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)	On-going

Goal 8: Protect and provide access to all our natural resources and expand the state's ability to respond to natural disasters and other disruptions and mitigate their impacts

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Increase awareness and advance stewardship messaging to protect the integrity of Colorado's natural and cultural resources	OEDIT (CTO)	Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Federal land management agencies, OEDIT (OREC), Statewide industry associations	On-going
Support initiatives to prevent and mitigate natural disasters and other disruptions. An economic development recovery support function (RSF) framework is currently in development	Multiple, depending on region	OEDIT (ROO/SBDC/MB/CTO), DOLA—Colorado Resiliency Office, CDPS, DHSEM	On-going

# COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE + RESOURCES

## DESIRED OUTCOME

Colorado fully establishes the physical infrastructure required to encourage healthy business retention and expansion, along with the community services needed for its workforce and their families to thrive.

While Colorado has made notable advancements in areas such as broadband expansion and maintains relatively better road and bridge conditions compared to national averages, the state faces ongoing challenges with aging infrastructure and meeting the funding necessary to continue to improve broadband, transportation and utilities like energy and water. For example, over 130,000 households—primarily in rural communities—lack broadband access, while the state struggles with an estimated \$14 billion funding gap in addressing road and bridge replacements, repairs and upgrades.<sup>51, 52</sup>

As the state’s population grows and migrates, demand for reliable energy and water infrastructure will also increase, underscoring the need for continued and strategic public investment. Colorado’s water system is under increasing strain from population growth, long-term warming and drying trends (aridification), major wildfires, and prolonged droughts. Water availability affects a wide range of sectors, including wildfire risk, public health, aquatic ecosystems, infrastructure, agriculture, and outdoor recreation. According to the [2023 Colorado Water Plan](#), the state could face an annual water supply gap of up to 740,000 acre-feet by 2050.<sup>53</sup>

The state also faces challenges with community services - access to affordable healthcare, excellent K-12 education, quality child care and direct care workforce professionals, including those who provide support and personal care for older adults and individuals with disabilities - especially in rural areas. Fifteen percent of early childhood educators live in poverty, a rate six times higher than K-8 teachers, and 12 percent of all teaching roles were unfilled in the 2023-24 school year.<sup>54, 55</sup> This shortage limits workforce participation, particularly among parents, and has ripple effects across local economies.

Access to healthcare is also under pressure. Colorado is projected to need nearly 1,800 more primary care physicians by 2030. This shortage is especially acute in rural areas, where residents already face limited access to care, long travel times for services, and challenges retaining physicians who often do not stay long in these communities.

As Colorado continues to grow, the need to modernize infrastructure and strengthen community support services is more pressing than ever. Addressing these issues through smart, targeted investments will be key to ensuring economic opportunity is shared across all regions. Expanding broadband, closing service gaps in healthcare and education, and improving transportation networks will not only enhance the quality of life for residents, but bolsters the state’s capacity to attract talent, support employers, and drive long-term prosperity.



## BROADBAND INVESTMENT

---

In 2023, the state received \$827 million from the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program to enhance internet connectivity, aiming to connect 99 percent of households to high-speed broadband.<sup>57</sup>

## COLORADO'S HEALTHCARE SECTOR <sup>58, 59, 60</sup>

---

Healthcare is Colorado's largest economic sector, with hospitals accounting for nearly one-third of national health expenditures. Prescription drug costs are a major contributor to rising expenses, with spending increasing significantly in recent years. Employers provide health insurance to about 50 percent of Coloradans, yet continue to face escalating costs—impacting wages and business investment. Addressing affordability in employer-sponsored coverage is a key opportunity for improving both health and economic outcomes.

## COLORADO'S MULTI-SECTOR PLAN ON AGING <sup>61</sup>

---

The [Colorado Multi-Sector Plan on Aging](#) is a strategic initiative that brings together various sectors—government, healthcare, community organizations, and businesses—to address the challenges and opportunities of an aging population.

### Core Objectives

The Multi-Sector Plan on Aging focuses on several key areas, including:

- *Community and Housing:* Ensuring that communities are age-friendly and that housing options are accessible and affordable for older adults.
- *Health and Wellness:* Promoting physical and mental health through accessible healthcare services and wellness programs.
- *Workforce and Economic Security:* Supporting older adults in remaining economically secure, whether through employment opportunities or financial assistance programs.
- *Transportation and Infrastructure:* Developing transportation systems that accommodate the mobility needs of older residents.
- *Family and Caregiving Support:* Providing resources and support for family caregivers who play a crucial role in the well-being of older adults.

## ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 9: Support strategic infrastructure investments that save money, enhance broadband connectivity, support resiliency, energy capacity, mobility, transportation, job growth, business development and quality of life.

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Support initiatives to expand digital infrastructure and broadband access across the state	Regional EDDs	OIT (Broadband Office), Private Sector (ISPs), Sector Partnerships	On-going
Support initiatives to strengthen physical infrastructure for critical utilities, including water, electric and energy	Regional EDDs	DOLA (CRO, Microgrids Program, EIAF), CDPS	On-going
Support regions in enhancing transportation and transit systems across the state to support businesses, workforce and communities	Regional EDDs	Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Rail Coalition	On-going
Support regions in expanding awareness of the long term maintenance for infrastructure and the cost savings when building smaller, more closely located assets	Regional EDDs	DOLA	On-going

Goal 10: Enable and increase access to community services (e.g., childcare, education, healthcare, mental health, and resources for people of all ages and abilities)

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Partner(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>
Support initiatives to increase access to affordable healthcare and mental health services	Regional EDDs	Behavioral Health Administration, Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF), Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), CCCS and community colleges	On-going
Support initiatives to expand affordable, high-quality childcare services, including employer-based childcare	Regional EDDs	Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC), sector partnerships	On-going
Support initiatives to increase access to quality K-12 education at all levels for Colorado residents	Regional EDDs	Colorado Department of Education (CDE)	On-going
Support initiatives to enhance public safety	Regional EDDs	Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS)	On-going
Support initiatives to provide resources for people of all ages and abilities across Colorado's regions	Regional EDDs	Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging (C4A), CDHS	On-going

# EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

## MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

The following metrics will be used to measure progress towards the goals:

Goal 1: Support the creation of and access to different types of housing options that meet the needs of each region’s workforce and residents

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Partner with state and local partners, housing authorities, municipalities, philanthropic agencies, industry partners, and developers to create attainable housing options for both homeowners and renters	Number of (new) housing units supported Number of community partner meetings Number of counties served/community projects funded
Leverage and align existing federal, state and local funding and improve program flexibility to increase local housing supply and capacity	Federal, state and local dollars used (including grants, loans, equity, community-created resources—tax revenue, housing-specific funds, etc.)
Support and grow the offsite (manufactured/modular), innovative building industry in Colorado to produce more attainable, efficient and affordable homes	Number of businesses supported Number of new Colorado-produced offsite/modular construction technology business establishments supported Funding awarded (all of the metrics include direct and indirect support across multiple funding tools)
Support energy efficient and multi-modal access (walkability and transit oriented) for all housing developments with medium and high density	To be confirmed





## Goal 2: Support the attraction, retention and training of an adaptable, skilled talent pool

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Partner with education and training programs across the state to cultivate homegrown talent and attract skilled workers in alignment with regional and state industry needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of business and industry partners engaged</li> <li>Development of regional industry-determined career pathways for all prioritized industries</li> <li>Number of new completers trained</li> <li>Number of trainings in each region</li> <li>Number of career advisors trained</li> <li>College credits in the K12 system</li> <li>Attainment of quality credentials</li> <li>Number of work-based learning (WBL) programs</li> </ul>
Collaborate to expand industry-led talent development through registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and other types of work-based learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of business and industry partners offering apprenticeship &amp; on-the-job training (OJT)</li> <li>Expand use of talent tax credit</li> <li>Number of CTE apprenticeships created</li> </ul>
Support employers through talent development initiatives to incentivize skills training aligned with industry needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of business and industry partners engaged in skills training and skills-first hiring practices</li> <li>Number of training engagements with business and industry</li> </ul>





Goal 3: Support business creation, expansion, retention and recruitment to strengthen regional economies and generate job growth

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Partner with regional and local economic development/talent partners to expand business recruitment and create programs for job creation and retention	Number of Rural jobs created and retained Tax credit utilization
Provide robust support for small businesses and entrepreneurs including advisory services and mentorship, technical assistance, continuity/resilience planning, exit planning, etc.	Number of Jobs Created / Retained Number of New Business Starts Amount of Capital Formation Number of Technical Assistance Hours Number of Entrepreneurship Support/ Education Partnerships
Support small businesses and entrepreneurs with a continuum of access to capital programs and partners that target market gaps	Funding awarded Number of businesses and jobs supported Geographic spread of awards
Attract more U.S. and global companies to Colorado, and help them find the talent and innovation resources they need to be successful	Number of businesses incentivized to expand or relocate to Colorado Number of jobs incentivized from expansion or relocation projects
Strengthen business development by optimizing efficient and innovative supply chain and advanced manufacturing capabilities	Number of CHIPS zones created
Retain businesses through innovative programs like employee-ownership transition models	Increase tax credit #1 use rate Open tax credit #2 in Jan 2026 Fully utilize Feasibility Study opportunity through RMEOC & CCWB before 12/30/ 2026 deadline Increase Exit Planning Program use rate by 20 percent throughout the SBDC Network
Expand and strengthen online educational resources available to businesses	Number of courses deployed Course participation rate

Goal 4: Enable and support the growth and development of existing state and regional target industries

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Strengthen coordination across economic development and workforce development in support of regional economic priorities	Number of industry/economic roundtables hosted
Leverage and track advanced industries investments	Investment towards focus industries

Goal 5: Encourage diversified and emerging industries to drive economic growth.

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Promote a modernized, resilient energy ecosystem by advancing a wide range of energy workforce opportunities	Number of jobs in various energy sectors/ecosystems JUST Transition program metrics (as noted in the <a href="#">Just Transition Action Plan</a> )
Work with regional and local partners to explore opportunities to diversify current regional industries/sector focus	Briefings on regional industry breakdowns
Cultivate new industry ecosystems and work with rural communities to take advantage of opportunities arising in emerging industries (for instance: industry advancements in clean energy, quantum, automation and technological advancement in agriculture, etc.)	Number of emerging industry (e.g., AgTech) roadshows/tradeshows



## Goal 6: Support the revitalization and development of vibrant, livable communities.

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Activate downtowns, main streets, locally-designated transit and neighborhood centers to improve business communities and quality of life	Number of transit stops approved Number of neighborhood centers approved Number of transit-oriented communities grants awarded
Support and enhance community character of Colorado's unique and individualistic cities and towns	Number of events Event participation rates Grants/dollars awarded across state
Preserve, develop and promote cultural sites, artistic attractions and community amenities	Grants/dollars awarded Number of visitors
Enhance continuity/preparedness planning and capacity in Colorado communities through regional collaboration and engagement	Number of DHSEM State Recovery Task Force meetings held; and participation rates Number of DHSEM Regional Emergency Management convenings; and participation rates Launch of new Disaster Preparedness and Recovery educational programming through the OEDIT online educational resources

## Goal 7: Continue to responsibly steward and strengthen the state's robust tourism/travel, outdoor recreation and arts/creative industries

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Advance Colorado's competitive position as a leading, multi-season destination and drive economic impact through investment in domestic and international destination promotion and brand development	As noted in the <a href="#">Dean Runyan Economic Impact Report</a> and <a href="#">Longwoods International Travel USA Report</a>
Elevate Colorado's outdoor industry through investment in outdoor recreation and activities that differentiate the state and drive economic development	KPIs of Outside Festival & Summit
Prioritize arts and culture through investment in initiatives that strengthen Colorado's leadership in arts and culture and drive economic development	Michelin KPI's Sundance Visitation
Advance inclusiveness and pursue ways that Colorado can share a welcoming experience for all travelers	Campaign Results Accessible Travel Program Participants
Provide impactful, valuable support for tourism industry partners and destinations to balance varied needs and strengthen local tourism economies	Number of CTO Grant Recipients Destination Development Program participation rate



Goal 8: Protect and provide access to all our natural resources and expand the state’s ability to respond to natural disasters and other disruptions and mitigate their impacts

Strategy	Evaluation Measures may include
Increase awareness and advance stewardship messaging to protect the integrity of Colorado’s natural and cultural resources	Number of views and engagement
Support initiatives to prevent and mitigate natural disasters and other disruptions. An economic development recovery support function (RSF) framework is currently in development	Participation on State Recovery Task Force Number of Regional Emergency Management Trainings Number of disaster specific coordinations completed on request Launch of online educational resources on Disaster Preparedness & Recovery



EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



Goal 9: Support strategic infrastructure investments that save money, enhance broadband connectivity, support resiliency, energy capacity, mobility, transportation, job growth, business development and quality of life

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Evaluation Measures may include</i>
Support initiatives to expand digital infrastructure and broadband access across the state	In alignment with applicable Regional CEDS Amount of middle mile projects and funding spent/received
Support initiatives to strengthen physical infrastructure for critical utilities, including water, electric and energy	In alignment with the Regional CEDS
Support regions in enhancing transportation and transit systems across the state to support businesses, workforce and communities	In alignment with the Regional CEDS
Support regions in expanding awareness of the long term maintenance for infrastructure and the cost savings when building smaller, more closely located assets	In alignment with the Regional CEDS

Goal 10: Enable and increase access to community services (e.g., childcare, education, healthcare, mental health, and resources for people of all ages and abilities)

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Evaluation Measures may include</i>
Support initiatives to increase access to affordable healthcare and mental health services	In alignment with the Regional CEDS
Support initiatives to expand affordable, high-quality childcare services, including employer-based childcare	In alignment with the Regional CEDS
Support initiatives to increase access to quality K-12 education at all levels for Colorado residents	In alignment with the Regional CEDS
Support initiatives to enhance public safety	In alignment with the Regional CEDS Number of grants provided
Support initiatives to provide resources for people of all ages and abilities across Colorado's regions	In alignment with the Regional CEDS

# Economic Resiliency

## SUPPORTING GROWTH THROUGH PREPAREDNESS

Being resilient is not an option for Colorado – it’s a necessity. The state is experiencing rapidly changing environmental, social and economic conditions. Colorado’s population is expected to grow from five million in 2010 to nearly seven million by 2040, and with that comes demographic shifts across the state, pressure on housing attainability, increased wear and tear on roads and infrastructure, and other challenges.<sup>62</sup> Globalization and technological advances present new opportunities and challenges for the economy and workforce. Communities across Colorado have been impacted by natural disasters like wildfires, floods, drought, and avalanches, as well as global concerns like COVID-19 and climate change. All these disruptions can have a significant economic impact on the state.

### Economic Impact of Natural Disasters

#### DROUGHT

Prolonged periods of dry conditions are bad for Colorado’s tourism and agricultural industries. A lack of precipitation can stress crops and cattle, reduce snowpack at ski-resorts, and reduce river flows that can hurt the rafting industry. Drought is expected to cause \$830 million in annual damages by 2050 to the tourism and agriculture industries. Counties that rely heavily on these industries, such as Weld and Summit Counties, will be hit the worst (CWCB, DHSEM, FEMA, 2020).

#### FLOODS

Severe floods frequently cause damage to Colorado’s transportation infrastructure and buildings. Between now and 2050, floods could cause up to \$930 million in annual damages to bridges and buildings. Counties with fast-growing populations that are building in or near flood plains are at the greatest risk (CWCB, DHSEM, FEMA, 2020)

#### WILDFIRES

Considering damage to buildings and the cost of fire suppression alone, wildfires are expected to cause \$440 million in damage annually by 2050 (Colorado State Forest Service, 2020). Fires and floods in particular can temporarily cut off communities, impacting tourism, supply chains, and other economic activity. For example, the 2020 Grizzly Creek Fire near Glenwood Springs disrupted I-70 travel, while subsequent flooding threats have ongoing impacts on the road.

Navigating these changes and disruptions requires an innovative and collaborative effort across State and local governments as well as Colorado’s communities. In response, the state has created the Governor’s Office of Climate Preparedness & Disaster Recovery and developed a Climate Preparedness Roadmap. By integrating resiliency into planning systems, programs, and infrastructure development, the state can support the long-term health and vitality of communities across Colorado.

#### COLORADO’S VISION FOR RESILIENCY

**Colorado creatively implements forward-thinking solutions that are sustainable and resilient to evolving conditions and result in strong, equitable communities that can adapt to and thrive in the face of change.**

## Planning for and Implementing Resiliency – Colorado Resiliency Office (CRO)

A key partner in the development of this statewide CEDS for Colorado has been the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Colorado Resiliency Office (CRO). It was established in response to the historic 2012 wildfires and 2013 floods that impacted communities in 24 of Colorado's 64 counties, causing over \$5 billion in damages, destroying over 3,000 homes and taking 17 lives. With a goal of *supporting a long-term adaptable and vibrant future for all Coloradans by building stronger, safer, and more resilient systems in the face of natural disasters and other shocks and stressors*, the CRO is a key partner and resource for Colorado communities.

### KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CRO

*As noted in Colorado Revised Statute (CRS) 24-32-122*

#### State Agency Coordination

- Provide technical assistance to implement resilience policies and procedures.
- Institutionalize resiliency practices across departments.
- Build resiliency criteria into State competitive grants.

#### Local Community Support

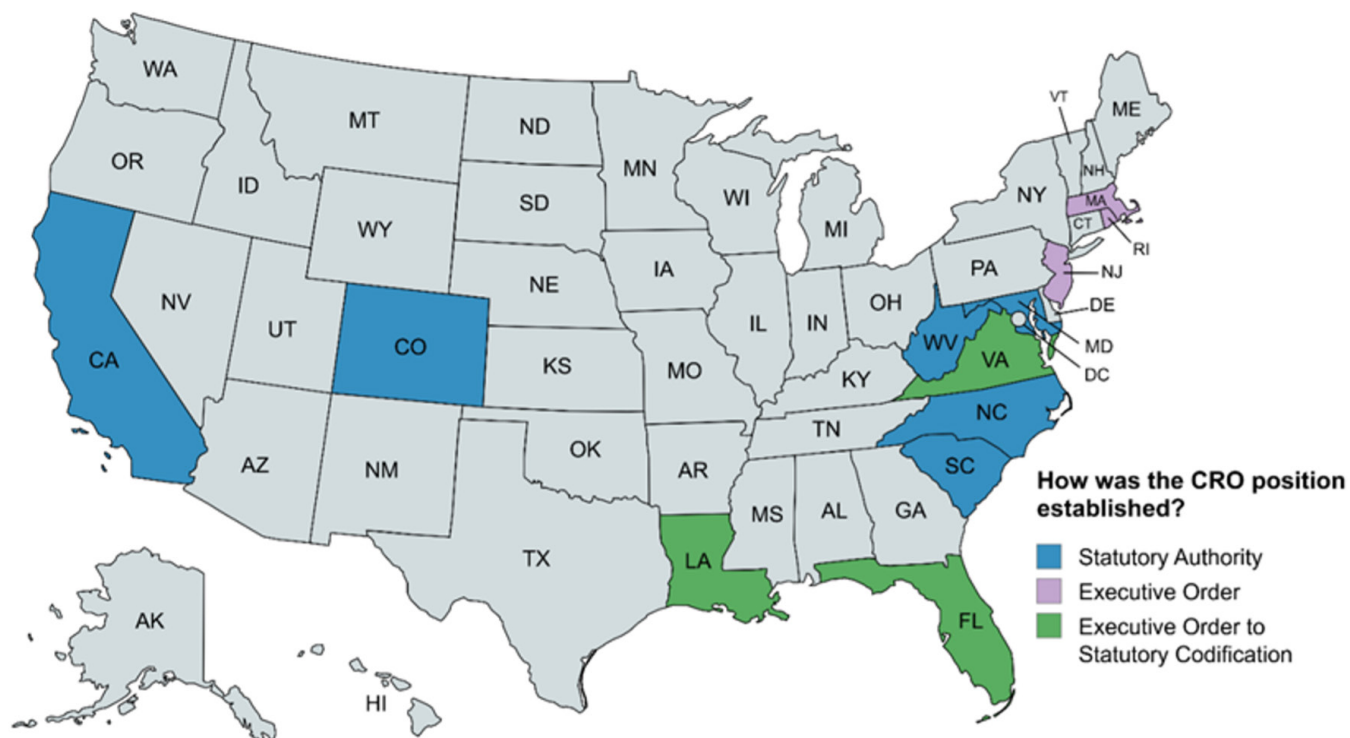
- Provide technical assistance to local governments for developing and implementing resiliency activities (e.g., developing resiliency frameworks, risk and vulnerability profiles, and economic development strategies).
- Help secure needed resources and funding to implement resiliency activities.
- Support long-term community recovery work and resource navigation after disasters.

#### Other Leadership Activities

FIGURE 19

**Map of U.S. states with a CRO color-coded by position establishment<sup>63</sup>**

**Note: Colorado is one of just 12 states that has an established state resiliency office.**





# KEY PROGRAMS—ON-THE-GROUND RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES

The CRO, in coordination with the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) regional managers, is an on-the-ground resource to support communities with resilience planning and implementation, pre-disaster, recovery planning and establishing information networks. They help communities understand the shocks and stresses they face, make connections across sectors to leverage resources and ideas, develop solutions that address multiple challenges, and build adaptability and preparedness into plans. The CRO also coordinates and collaborates across State agencies and with local, state, federal, private, and non-governmental partners to ensure that Colorado communities are resilient to disruptions and adapt to changing environmental, social, and economic conditions.

1. *The Resilient Colorado Communities Program* is designed to support communities in addressing their vulnerabilities and risks. The program includes:
- Resilience workshops and webinars to help Colorado communities build capacity, including Camp Resilience, a one-day, in-person workshop focused on equipping community leaders to adapt to change and plan for the future
  - Local resilience planning and implementation support to help Colorado communities integrate resilience into their local planning processes
  - Resilience funding and best practices, offering funding, tools and best practices for communities to enhance their own resilience efforts
  - Facilitating local resilience networks and communities, through peer exchanges, continuing discussions from Camp Resilience and engaging local government leaders and partners in advancing resilience efforts.

## RESILIENCY IN ACTION

### BUSINESS ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19: TOWN OF BASALT (REGION 12)

*The Town of Basalt worked in conjunction with the Basalt Chamber of Commerce to find quick solutions that would address the different public health restrictions, including reduced occupancy in restaurants and limited gatherings. The Basalt Chamber assisted with communications to educate both business owners and their employees, as well as tourists visiting the area, about new parking alternatives. Through public-private collaborations, the town was quickly able to adapt to the new environment, providing much needed vitality and a boost to the local economy.*

### CAMP RESILIENCE

*In 2024, community teams from Akron, Wiggins, Wray, Limon, and Brush participated with representatives from local government and community partners. The teams discussed shocks and stressors facing their communities and developed ideas to address these challenges in their community projects, plans and processes – and identified key success factors such as developing flexible goals, creating backup plans, and the importance of trying new ways to address potential threats.*

2. *The Rural Resilience and Recovery Roadmap Program, a partnership between DOLA and OEDIT, brought together 16 Regional Community Teams, made up of over 150 rural jurisdictions and other non-governmental partners. Each team developed a Roadmap that will result in regionally aligned and actionable strategies to help Colorado’s rural communities recover from COVID and be more resilient to future disruptions.*

## RESILIENCY IN ACTION

### RURAL RESILIENCE AND THE NORTHWEST COLORADO DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

---

*The NWCDC, a collaboration between Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties, was formed as part of the Rural Resilience and Recovery Roadmap program to build resilience to the ongoing coal transition and to strengthen the region through entrepreneurship and economic infrastructure. This collaborative initiative hosts programs, services, and initiatives in partnership with federal, state, higher education, workforce, and philanthropic partners and has developed a robust pipeline of 14 business and community development projects expected to generate an estimated 482 direct jobs and \$1.84 billion in capital investment.<sup>64</sup>*

3. *The Rural Prosperity Program, works with local governments to build economic resilience and diversification in rural communities and helps communities navigate change and economic transitions, disruptions, and recovery.*

## RESILIENCY IN ACTION

### CHAFFEE COUNTY ASCENT ACCELERATOR

---

*This CRO-funded program is designed to build resilience and economic diversification – and to lessen the reliance on tourism – through entrepreneur support. This 12-week business growth program for local entrepreneurs is committed to building economic development through collaboration and continuous learning, supporting innovation and entrepreneurship by creating an ecosystem of growth resources to propel entrepreneurs to startup and scale, while elevating their communities.*

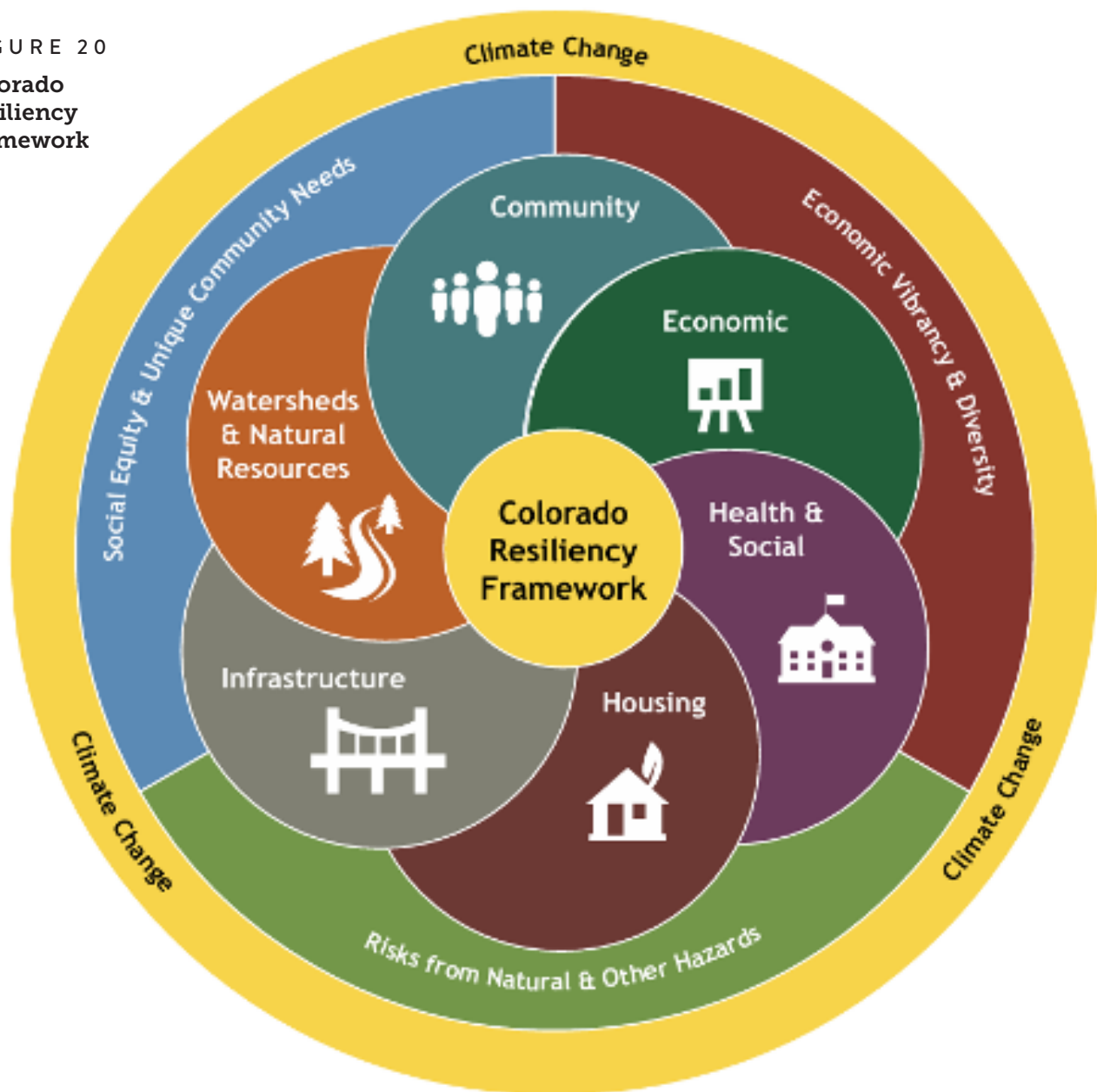
## Colorado's Resiliency Framework: A Leading Example for Resilience Planning and Implementation

The [Colorado Resiliency Framework](#) (the Framework), which was first released in 2015 and updated in 2020, is held up as an example of how states are leading the way in resilience planning. The framework brings together six sector perspectives to examine and address risks and vulnerabilities across four themes:

- Adapting to our changing climate
- Understanding risks from natural and other hazards
- Addressing social inequities and unique community needs
- Pursuing economic diversity and vibrancy

FIGURE 20

### Colorado Resiliency Framework



The Framework includes a hierarchy of components to drive action and progress towards expanding Colorado’s resiliency. The resiliency priorities and goals noted in the framework are reflected in the core goals and strategies outlined in this CEDS.



The State’s resiliency prioritization criteria were developed as part of the first 2015 Colorado Resiliency Framework as a tool to ensure the State’s limited resources promote multiple economic, social, and environmental benefits.

COLORADO RESILIENCY PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA			
Co-Benefits	Economic Benefit-Cost	Innovation	Adaptive Capacity
High Risk and Vulnerability	Social Equity	Harmonize with Existing Activity	Long-term and Lasting Impact
	Technical Soundness		

### AN AWARD-WINNING FRAMEWORK

In recognition of the State’s trailblazing work, the Framework received a 2016 American Council of Engineering Gold award and 2017 American Planning Association National Planning Achievement Award for Environmental Planning Gold Award. More recently, the Colorado Resiliency Framework 2020 Update received a Sustainability and Environmental Planning Merit Award in 2022 from the American Planning Association, Colorado Chapter.

Colorado is currently in the process of updating the Resiliency Framework in 2025. The new framework will emphasize cross-agency collective action to address the most pressing shocks and stresses facing the state.



## Endnotes

- 1 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18dxHIBZCquks3CQ7Gt38N816BOZ3t-Ae/view?usp=sharing>
- 2 CO Association of Realtors (<https://car-co.stats.showingtime.com/docs/mmi/2024-12/x/Statewide?src=page>)
- 3 CO Association of Realtors—(<https://car-co.stats.showingtime.com/docs/mmi/2015-12/x/Statewide?src=page>)
- 4 <https://www.travelandleisure.com/top-housing-markets-in-united-states-2025-realtor-com-ranking-8763563>
- 5 <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/stgdppi4q24-a2024.pdf>
- 6 [https://apps.bea.gov/itable/ReqID=70&step=1&\\_gl=1\\*1nwbk51\\*\\_](https://apps.bea.gov/itable/ReqID=70&step=1&_gl=1*1nwbk51*_)
- 7 <https://cdle.colorado.gov/press-releases/press-release-colorado-employment-situation-january-2025#:~:text=The%20annual%20unemployment%20rate%20for,in%202024%2C%20or%2033%2C%200%20jobs.>
- 8 <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2020-2024/state/totals/NST-EST2024-POP.xlsx>
- 9 <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/racebyage.html>
- 10 Census—2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates | S1501
- 11 State Demography Office
- 12 <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/demodashboard.html#>
- 13 <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Colorado/273737>
- 14 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “SAGDP1 State annual gross domestic product (GDP) summary” (accessed Thursday, May 15, 2025)
- 15 [https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286\\_agricultural\\_economy\\_in\\_colorado\\_0.pdf](https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286_agricultural_economy_in_colorado_0.pdf)
- 16 [https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286\\_agricultural\\_economy\\_in\\_colorado\\_0.pdf](https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286_agricultural_economy_in_colorado_0.pdf)
- 17 Figure created using data from Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS); Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), 2024.
- 18 [https://www.bls.gov/regions/mountain-plains/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover\\_colorado.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/mountain-plains/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover_colorado.htm)
- 19 Built In Colorado, OEDIT ‘The State of VC Colorado Report—2020’, Innosphere Ventures ‘Colorado Venture Capital Ecosystem, 2024’
- 20 PitchBook Data, Inc | Created with Datawrapper
- 21 PitchBook Data, Inc. | Created with Datawrapper
- 22 PitchBook Data, Inc. | Created with Datawrapper | Innosphere Ventures ([https://innosphereventures.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Colorado-VC-2024-Final\\_.pdf](https://innosphereventures.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Colorado-VC-2024-Final_.pdf))
- 23 <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/opportunity/affordability>
- 24 <https://coloradonewsline.com/2023/01/21/affordable-reliable-sustainable-utility/> | <https://www.citizensutilityboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Electric-Utility-Performance-Report-Second-Edition-final.pdf>
- 25 <https://www.flydenver.com/press-release/denver-international-airport-ranked-as-sixth-busiest-airport-in-the-world-in-2023/>
- 26 National Governors Association
- 27 <https://dlg.colorado.gov/news-article/april-2024-resiliency-conversation-planning-ahead-for-water-uncertainty>
- 28 Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2022
- 29 <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/housing.html>
- 30 <https://coloradoaffordablehousingfinancingfund.com/>
- 31 Colorado General Assembly, 2024 Housing Bills
- 32 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024
- 33 Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2024
- 34 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023
- 35 U.S. Census Bureau, 2023
- 36 Global Business Alliance, <https://globalbusiness.org/state/colorado/>
- 37 U.S. Census Bureau, 2023
- 38 PitchBook, 2024
- 39 Economic Innovation Group, 2021
- 40 2023 Small Business Profile, U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy
- 41 axios.com, 2024
- 42 U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024
- 43 wsj.com, 2024
- 44 [https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286\\_agricultural\\_economy\\_in\\_colorado\\_0.pdf](https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/r23-286_agricultural_economy_in_colorado_0.pdf)
- 45 OEDIT) <https://choosecolorado.com/key-industries/outdoor-recreation/>
- 46 <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>
- 47 Dean Runyan report 2023 ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-JV6YfMyRW4awSd\\_WaQCHEFo1A-w8Cbs/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-JV6YfMyRW4awSd_WaQCHEFo1A-w8Cbs/view))
- 48 Downtown Denver Partnership - 2023 State of Downtown Report
- 49 <https://oedit.colorado.gov/blog-post/building-an-affordable-future>
- 50 City of Grand Junction Parks & Recreation ([https://www.gjcity.org/168/Economic-Impact-Reports?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.gjcity.org/168/Economic-Impact-Reports?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
- 51 CBO’s 2024 Year in Review
- 52 Colorados ASCE Section’s 2025 Report Card
- 53 <https://dlg.colorado.gov/news-article/april-2024-resiliency-conversation-planning-ahead-for-water-uncertainty>
- 54 Rocky Mountain PBS—<https://www.rmpbs.org/blogs/rocky-mountain-pbs/colorado-preschool-staffing-crisis>
- 55 Colorado Department of Education
- 56 Economic Impact of Travel 2023 report by DRA prepared by the Colorado Tourism Office
- 57 Colorado Newsline
- 58 <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/health-spending-by-provider-type/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22states%22:%7B%22colorado%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%7B%22sort%22:%7B%22desc%22%7D>
- 59 [https://civhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CO-Drug-Rebate-Report\\_1.8.2020.pdf](https://civhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CO-Drug-Rebate-Report_1.8.2020.pdf)
- 60 <https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/research/aca-10-years-employer-sponsored-insurance>
- 61 <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/lifelong-colorado>
- 62 <https://coresiliency.colorado.gov/identifying-risk/>
- 63 <https://www.ncsl.org/environment-and-natural-resources/state-resilience-offices>
- 64 <https://coresiliency.colorado.gov/roadmap-program>