



NORTHEAST COLORADO COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2024 NECO CEDS

NORTHEAST COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

<http://www.necalg.org/>

231 Main Street, Suite 211, Fort Morgan, CO, United States, 80701

Table of Contents

ABOUT NORTHEAST COLORADO & NECALG..... 2

PURPOSE OF THIS CEDS..... 5

BUILDING ON THE REGIONAL ROADMAP 6

THE PLANNING PROCESS..... 7

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT & DATA ANALYSIS..... 8

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT 21

SWOT ANALYSIS 24

VISION & STRATEGIC DIRECTION..... 26

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES 30

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION MATRIX..... 39

PATH FORWARD & NEXT STEPS..... 41

ABOUT NORTHEAST COLORADO & NECALG

Northeast Colorado is a rural agricultural area comprised of six counties including: Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma. Located in the northeastern corner of the state, it is referred to as “Region 1” and does not have a designated Economic Development District, but the six counties have active economic development corporations, and many municipalities are actively involved in economic development initiatives.

Rural economies like Northeast Colorado possess a distinct set of characteristics that differentiate them from urban and suburban areas. Their uniqueness stems from factors such as geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, reliance on natural resources, and smaller population densities. In rural areas, agriculture often serves as a primary economic driver, shaping local cultures and livelihoods. Additionally, rural economies often face challenges such as limited access to essential services like healthcare and education, as well as disparities in income and employment opportunities. However, rural communities also exhibit resilience and tight-knit social networks, fostering a sense of community and collective identity. Recognizing the distinctiveness of rural economies is essential for developing tailored policies and strategies that support sustainable development and inclusive growth in these areas.

The Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade refers to the 6-county region as the “The Golden Plains” and describes it as “Colorado Simplified.” OEDIT also reports that “Economic development specialists in this region have worked diligently to move the region forward and have long-standing relationships and regional cooperation in economic development. The Golden Plains Region is dedicated to creating jobs, attracting new business, fostering a stable and diversified economy, and maintaining and improving the quality of life in the region.”

OEDIT reports that this region offers these top assets:

- Rural Area with Two Class One Railroads and an Airport Capable of Landing 737 Aircraft
- Three of the Top Four Agriculture Producing Counties in the State Are Located in the Region
- Vast Recreational Opportunities within the South Platte River and Four Large Public Access Reservoirs
- A Simple, Straightforward Way of Living and Doing Business



This plan will provide additional context based on significant data research, review of regional and state plans and related policies. The region includes designated zones described below and additional context is provided in the appendix:

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

The Opportunity Zone program, introduced in the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act, is a federal incentive that encourages long-term private investments in designated low-income communities by giving investors tax benefits for investing in real estate projects and operating businesses. Investors receive tax incentives in the form of deferral and elimination of state and federal capital gains taxes. This program will sunset December 2026 and the Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade (OEDIT) has reduced its active programming to support the incentive. However, OEDIT will continue to provide information to support communities, project sponsors, and investors to help them make the most of the Opportunity Zone incentive. With over 4800 square miles of Opportunity Zone designations in 8 different census tracts, this is a rural agricultural area in the northeastern corner of the state.

ENTERPRISE ZONES

The Colorado legislature created the Enterprise Zone (EZ) Program to encourage development in economically distressed areas of the state. The 16 designated enterprise zones have high unemployment rates, low per capita income, or slow population growth. Businesses, taxpayers, and economic developers may be eligible to receive tax credits and incentives. The entire 6 county region is in the Northeast Central Enterprise Zone and with the exception of Morgan County, the region is in an enhanced rural enterprise zone that allows for additional incentives.

FEMA COMMUNITY DISASTER RESILIENCE ZONES

These zones aim to build and strengthen community resilience across the nation by driving federal, public, and private resources to the most at-risk and in-need communities. Tracts in **Sedwick and Yuma Counties** were identified on September 6, 2023, because the composite National Risk Index score ranks in the top 50 nationally or in the top 1% within their state and it is identified as a disadvantaged community by the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool.

This planning process was driven by a CEDS Working Group represented by the Town of Akron, Morgan County, Phillips County Economic Development Corporation, Yuma County Economic Development Corporation, Logan County Economic Development Corporation, Washington County, Community Economic Development of Sedgwick County and overseen by the Northeast Colorado Association of Local Governments (NECALG).

ABOUT NECALG

The Northeastern Colorado Association of Local Governments is a voluntary association of county and municipal governments from Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties. NECALG was started in Wray, Colorado in 1972 operating in the newly designated Planning and Management Region One. The Agency's purpose is to promote cooperation and



NECALG

IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:



TRANSPORTATION

providing effective and cost-efficient public transportation services to the Northeastern Colorado region. NECALG operates County Express, Prairie Express, and the new Bustang Outrider service from Sterling to Greeley and Denver.



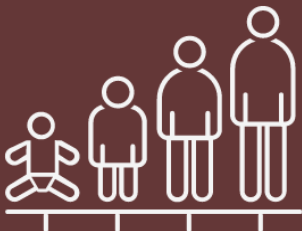
GRANTS & FUNDING

helping entrepreneurs in the community identify programs and funding opportunities that can support local projects through their website.



COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

offering services to help income-qualified individuals receive vision care, dental care, and help stock local food banks. In 2017, NECALG proudly served 1,247 individuals.



AREA AGENCY ON AGING

providing leadership in assessing the strengths and needs of older adults in the region. The Area Agency on Aging for Region 1 facilitates strategic planning and implementation, while also funding and providing services to benefit older adults over 60 years of age and their caregivers, regardless of age.



NECALG'S CORE VALUES

Transparency- accessible, candid, and transparent

Courageous- bold in the risks taken

Lead by Example- devoted to integrity and equality

Make an Impact- impact on the community

PURPOSE OF THIS CEDS

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will serve as the regionally driven and locally based economic development and resilience roadmap for Northeast Colorado. The plan, by its nature, is a tangible deliverable, but the planning process before, during, and following the development of the document will help guide collaboration across the region. This CEDS serves as a mechanism for a spectrum of stakeholders (individuals, organizations, local governments, and private industry) to engage in ongoing discussions, planning, and implementation to serve as a foundation of economic prosperity.

This plan builds on the strengths of Northeast Colorado and identifies gaps in resources, capacity, or subject matter expertise that need to be addressed. This allows for the region to be strategic when acting on economic development projects and strategies. Further, the region will be more resilient and better positioned to plan for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and economic shocks based on the content guidelines by USEDA of the CEDS. With a CEDS in place, the Northeast Colorado region will be in a better position to attract federal funds and technical assistance by demonstrating resources are used efficiently and effectively.



This document has been designed as a foundation for region-wide engagement and collaboration as opposed to a static, lengthy document. It serves as a catalyst for an engaging platform that generates regional discussion in local municipalities and regions in Northeast Colorado. This plan serves as a call to action for economic development strategies and activities throughout the six counties.

This living plan is supported and implemented by local, county, state, and federal governments as well as nonprofits, universities, etc. Overall, the actions of this plan are intended to promote economic prosperity throughout the Region. Businesses ultimately play the lead role in propelling economic growth, innovation, and job creation. This approach relies on the premise that the private sector, with its efficiency, resourcefulness, and competitive drive, can effectively identify and capitalize on market opportunities, driving productivity and economic diversification.

Governments in Northeast Colorado can support this model by creating conducive environments through deregulation, tax incentives, and infrastructure investments, thereby enabling businesses to thrive. The private sector's investment in research and development fuels technological advancements and new industries, further stimulating economic expansion. Additionally, through public-private partnerships, the private sector can contribute to the development of critical infrastructure and services, blending commercial success with public benefit. This model underscores the importance of entrepreneurship, small business development, and external investment as key engines of economic growth. By harnessing the dynamism of the private sector, economies can achieve sustainable development, adaptability to local, state, and national market changes, and increased competitiveness.

BUILDING ON THE REGIONAL ROADMAP

This CEDS expands on the work completed with the recent (2023) Regional Roadmap plan utilizing that plan's stakeholder engagement and corresponding data. This plan builds on several of the Roadmap's recommendations and expands upon them for implementation with objectives and strategies (actions/projects/programs) with updated leading practices and approaches for economic development success. This document is not a supplement to the Regional Roadmap but complements the findings and recommendations from that plan. The key initiatives identified include:

Develop a Proactive Marketing Campaign: Create a marketing campaign that tells the story of the region and its quality of life. Highlight existing job opportunities to attract workforce and businesses and demonstrate new opportunities for business relocation and expansion.

Demonstrate Investment Value: Generate content using federal, state, and local data demonstrating the market demand for new housing to attract private investors.

Regional Marketing Business Model: While this was originally a primary focus area for this project, it has decreased in priority compared to some of the other regional needs.

Support for Existing Businesses: Provide resources for succession planning as a significant portion of the Northeast workforce approaches retirement in the coming years.

Regional Homegrown Talent Initiative: Build upon the success of the Holyoke RE-1J efforts with a focused Homegrown Talent Initiative. Expand educational opportunities and work experiences for youth to bolster the Northeast regional workforce.

Older Adult Assessment Framework: Develop support systems for the Northeast older adult population, focusing specifically on senior housing, workforce transition and business succession, and workforce and economic development.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS): Unlock access to federal and state funding to support regional efforts in workforce and economic development with a CEDS. The Roadmap recommended dovetailing their strategy's engagement processes and recommendations.

Agricultural/Manufacturing Sector Development Strategies: Explore value-add opportunities, emerging industries, and agricultural products to boost Northeast's leading industries: agriculture and manufacturing.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

This CEDS planning process got underway in June 2023, beginning with a review of background information, a virtual kick-off meeting with the Northeast Colorado CEDS Working Group, and a follow-up onsite meeting in July. Specific tasks and elements of the planning process included:



The creation of any economic development plan involves defining directions for actions based on the needs and goals identified. While this entails extensive research and analysis of relevant data points, public perceptions are equally important – particularly in revealing impediments to growth that need to be addressed for the region to maximize its potential. Thus, a deliberate, all-inclusive approach was taken to produce a meaningful and effective CEDS for the Northeast Colorado Region.

Background conditions, a variety of regional work projects and other region-focused studies were reviewed. These documents helped to identify opportunities for synergies and collaboration – particularly in areas where support and/or resources already exist – helping to better align the CEDS with other initiatives underway in the region. The background assessment (a summary of the economic conditions of the region) also includes data research, demographic indicators, plan & document reviews, and stakeholder engagement to inform the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats). The SWOT supports the development of the strategic vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and performance metrics and evaluation criteria.

This thorough assessment of the current region's economic development health supports the identification of challenges and opportunities. In addition to the region's Roadmap plan and related documents, dozens of plans were reviewed and focused on specific areas NEALG requested including **workforce, climate resilience, transportation, broadband, and the pending Colorado Statewide CEDS**. This comprehensive review ensured, to the extent possible, that this CEDS aligns with existing plans. This plan also incorporates **economic resilience, equity, workforce, and climate resilience** throughout the document and the planning process which are additional initiatives as recommended by the USED CEDS guidelines. Plans reviewed and datasets researched are listed in the appendix.

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT & DATA ANALYSIS

This plan includes a review of existing data (provided in the appendix) and new data for a comprehensive assessment of the region's demographics, key industries, and indicators that illustrate the economic health of Northeastern Colorado. Researching a variety of datasets from over a dozen data dashboards and datasets, this section identified a new dataset publicly announced by the Argonne National Laboratory and USED A on March 1, 2024, the National Economic Resilience Data Explorer (NERDE)._ This comprehensive data dashboard supported the datasets assessed for this plan. Over 21 data and demographics charts are illustrated for the 6-county Northeast Colorado ("selected area"). Additionally, this document includes county-specific summary overviews plus an additional 7 data sets for each county within the region are included in the appendix. All the datasets can be linked to a website for Northeast Colorado and will be updated regularly by Argonne. Other data sets will be noted if they are from USED A's funded Stats America data dashboard. Several datasets and demographic indicators were reviewed and are listed in the appendix.

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Total Population

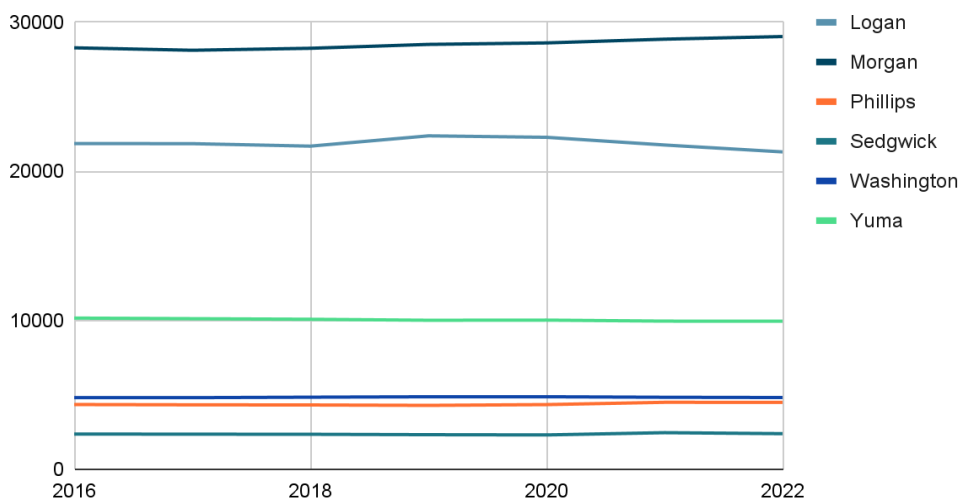


Table 1 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

The total population count of the 6 County Region has remained relatively consistent with little change since 2016. No specific county stands out with significant changes in population. The population of the counties from highest to lowest are: Morgan close to 30,000, Logan above 20,000, Yuma at 10,000, Washington and Phillips both near 5,000, and Sedgwick with less than 3,000.

The 6 County Region's age by percentage of the population illustrates that females have and continue to be older than the Region's average and males. There was a decline in age from 2018 to 2020 with the average female age decreasing nearly 10% in that period. However, the Region's population has been increasing in average age since 2020 with the female population average age increasing at a rapid rate compared to the Regional average age and the male average age. These data sets become significant in data charts later in this report regarding labor participation, particularly prime age labor force participation which is ages 25 to 54.

Age by Percentage of Population

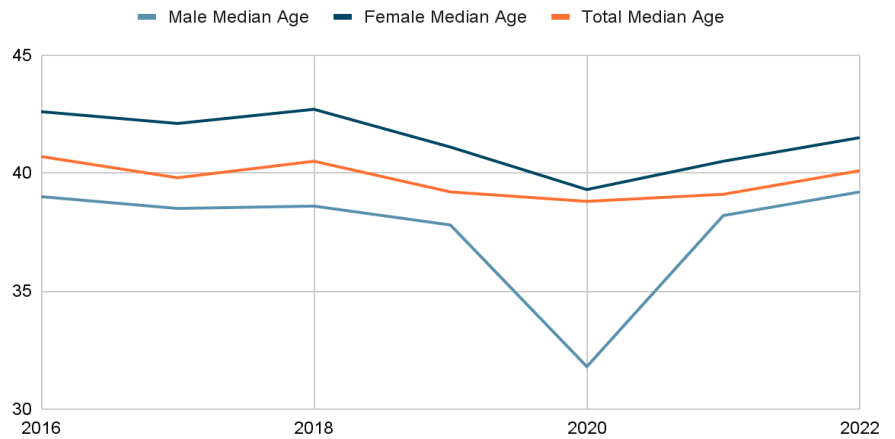
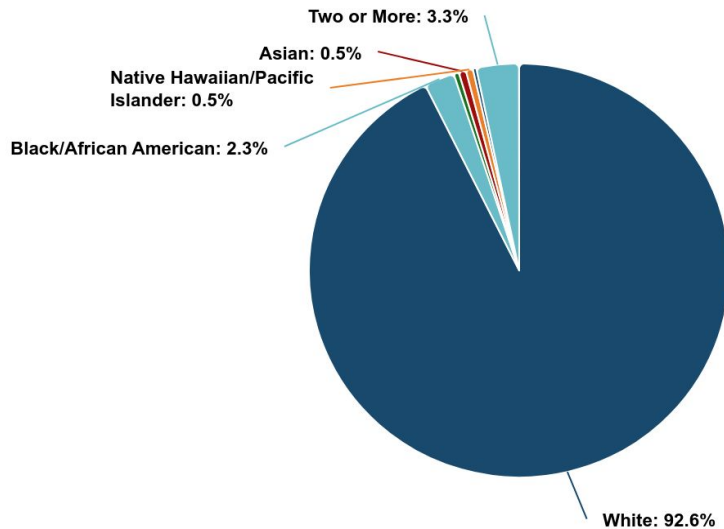


Table 2: SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

Race by Percentage of Population



Over 92% of the 6-County population is white compared to 85% at the state level. Logan is 92%, Morgan is 90%, Phillips is 98%, Sedgwick is 94%, Washington and Yuma are both 96% white.

Table 3 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

Approximately 80% of the 6 County Region's population only speak English in their home with **14% speaking only Spanish and 6% speaking Spanish and English less well in their home**. Therefore, it is vital that related communications are available in Spanish and that strategic outreach to Spanish-speaking communities is embraced. (SOURCE: Argonne NERDE)

Over 58% of the 6 County Region has a minimum of a high school graduation or higher (some college, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate professional degree) compared to the 64% at the state level. Approximately 14% have a bachelor's degree or graduate professional degree compared to 30% at the state level illustrated in the table to the right.

Northeast Colorado 6 County Region Education Levels

Category	Education by Percent of Population
Less than 9th Grade	4.2%
9th to 12th (No Diploma)	4.7%
High School Graduate	21.8%
Some College	15.6%
Associate's degree	7.4%
Bachelor's Degree	9%
Graduate Professional	4.9%

Table 4 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DATA

INDUSTRY (GROSS DOMESTIC/REGIONAL PRODUCT & LOCATION QUOTIENT)

The **County Economic Performance Index** measures the percent change in county-level gross regional product (GRP - the monetary value of all final goods and services produced in a regional economy in a given year) over time for the 6 County Region. The 6 County Region (selected area) is significantly more volatile than the State of Colorado.

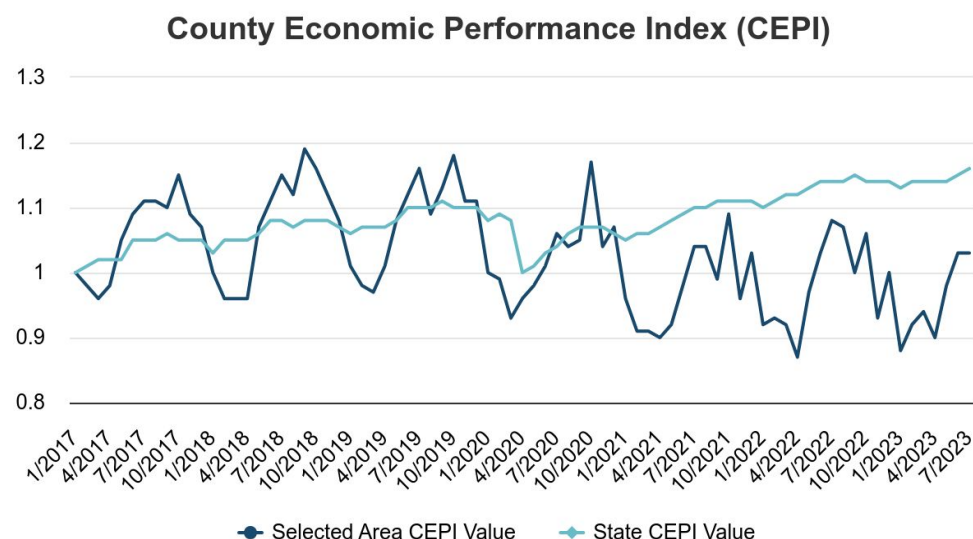
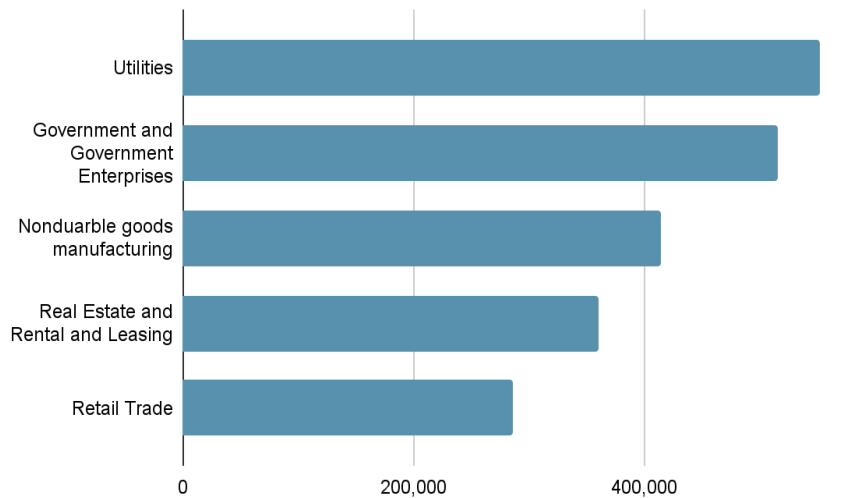


Table 5 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

The top five industries by Gross Domestic Product in the 6 County Region are **utilities, government & government enterprises, nondurable goods manufacturing, real estate/rental/leasing, and retail trade.**

Top 5 Industries by GDP



However, the top five industries by number of jobs include (from highest to lowest) government and government enterprises, farm employment, retail trade, manufacturing, and health care & social assistance in the 6 County Region. The government is the leading industry by the number of jobs for both Logan and Phillips Counties, second to manufacturing in Morgan County, and second to farm employment in Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties.

Table 6 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

Since the top five industries by jobs, apart from government and retail, differ from the top five industries by gross domestic product. Therefore, jobs in the utilities, nondurable manufacturing, and real estate industries are likely to be more lucrative. Additionally, there is a significant reliance on the government for employment and GDP in Northeast Colorado.

The location quotient data on the following page provide context on how the region is economically dependent on the agriculture industry.

Top 5 Industries by Number of Jobs

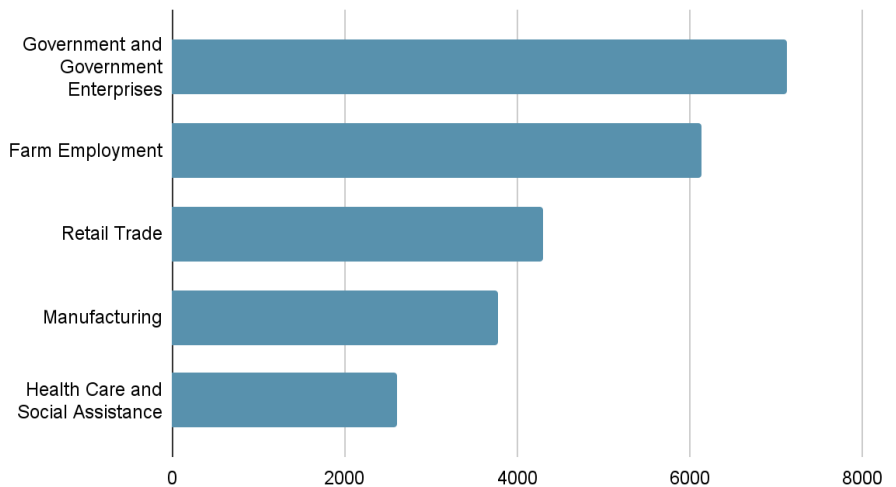


Table 7 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

Location Quotient (LQ) is a measure of industry concentration as a ratio compared to the distribution of those fields in that industry nationally. If an LQ value is above 1.0, then it indicates that the industry makes up a greater share locally than it does nationally.

This section shows the top eight industries within the county by their associated LQ value. In addition, it shows the annual average rate of change for the past five years for the top 8 industries. Industries with a rate of change that is between -.025 and .025 are considered stable. Industries with a negative rate of change that exceeds -.025 are classified as declining. Industries with a positive rate of change that exceeds .025 are classified as growing. The chart on the next page illustrates the top employment quotient industries of each county and the average of the entire 6 County Region. (LQ for by wages, number of establishments, and employment for each county are in the County Summary Appendix). The LQ Estimated Regional Rate of Change by Employment is by far most strongly represented by the **Agriculture Industry (11) with Mining, Quarrying, Oil & Gas Extraction Industry (21), and Utilities Industry (22) as the second and third strongest industries.**

Industry	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	EST. Regional Rate of Change
Utilities (22)	5	3.8	3.8	0	0	0	2.1 ++
Mining, Quarrying, Oil & Gas Extraction (21)	5	4	4	0	0	8	3.5 ++
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting (11)	4.3	8.1	8.1	12.5	0	24	9.5 +++
Retail Trade (44-45)	1.3	0	0	1.5	0.9	1	0.61 +
Health Care & Social Assistance (62)	1.1	0	0	0	0	0	0.18 =
Other Services Except Public Administration (81)	1	0	0	0	0.5	1	0.41 +
Manufacturing (31-33)	0	2.5	2.5	1	0	0	1 +
Construction (23)	0	1	1	0.5	0	0	0.41 +
Information (51)	0	1	1	0	0.4	0	0.4 +
Wholesale Trade (42)	0	0	0	1.5	0	2	0.58 +
Administrative & Waste Services (56)	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0.08 =
Transportation & Warehousing (48-49)	0	0	0	0	1.15	0	0.19 =
Finance & Insurance (52)	0	0	0	0	0.85	1	0.3 +
Real Estate Rental & Leasing (53)	0	0	0	0	0.6	0	0.1 +

Table 8 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

INCOME

The poverty rate for 2021 was 13% in Northeastern Colorado, 9.7% in Colorado, and 11.6% in the United States. Logan County had the highest poverty rate at 16.4% followed by Sedgwick County at 14.2%. **The poverty rates for children in 2021 in Northeast Colorado were significantly higher (18%) than the national average (5.2%) and much higher than the state average (11.8%).** Sedgwick County had the highest child poverty rate at 21.3% (double the state average and four times the national average). Logan County and Yuma County both had approximately 18% child poverty in 2021 illustrated in the table below:

	Logan County	Morgan County	Washington County	Yuma County	Sedgwick County	Phillips County	Colorado	NECO
Poverty Rate in 2021	16.4	12.4	11.6	13.5	14.2	11.9	9.7	13
Poverty Rate for Children under 18 in 2021	18.1	16.3	16.9	18.2	21.3	16.4	11.8	18

Table 9 SOURCE: StatsAmerica

The chart to the right illustrates the median household income (MHI) for each of the counties and demonstrates that Morgan County's MHI has been steadily increasing and is now well above the other counties in the 6 County Region. Overall, each county in the Region has been demonstrating an increase since 2020 at varied rates. There was little to no consistency in MHI in each of the Region's counties prior to 2020.

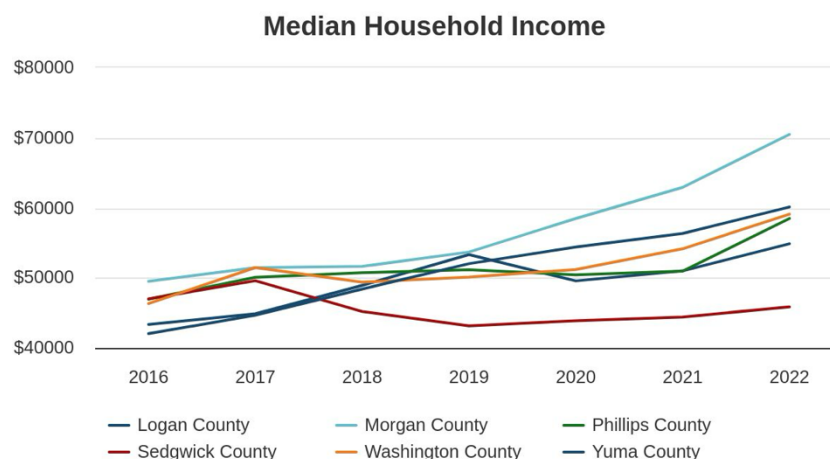


Table 10 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

PER CAPITA INCOME (PCI)

The 2022 **PCI for Northeast Colorado's 6 County Region was \$46,762**. Morgan County had the highest 2022 PCI at \$50,644 and Washington County had the lowest at \$43,000. The State of Colorado's 2022 PCI is \$75,772 and the national average was \$65,423. Per capita income and 24-month unemployment data for geography are specific distress datasets to qualify for many funding opportunities with USED A and other agencies. The 24 Month Unemployment is discussed next in the Workforce Section. (SOURCE: Stats America)

INCOME INEQUALITY

The Gini Index is a summary measure of income inequality. The Gini coefficient incorporates the detailed shares data into a single statistic, which summarizes the dispersion of income across the entire income distribution. The Gini coefficient ranges from 0, indicating perfect equality (where everyone receives an equal share), to 1, perfect inequality (where only one recipient or group of recipients receives all the income). The Gini is based on the difference between the Lorenz curve (the observed cumulative income distribution) and the notion of a perfectly equal income distribution. The Average Gini Index for **the 6 County Region is 0.44 with Morgan County with the lowest score of 0.41 and Phillips County with the highest score of 0.51 compared to the national average of 0.48.**

	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	EST. Regional Rate of Change
GINI COEFFICIENT	0.42	0.41	0.51	0.50	0.43	0.42	0.44

Table 11 SOURCE: US Census Gini Index/NERDE

EMPLOYMENT/WORKFORCE

As previously stated, USEDAs uses PCI and 24-month unemployment (illustrated in chart below) to qualify distress criteria for funding opportunities. Northeast Colorado's 6 County Region (Selected Area) follows the general unemployment trend as the national unemployment rate, but 2 to 4% lower. (SOURCE: Argonne NERDE)

24-Month Unemployment Rate: Selected Area (6 County Region) vs National Rate

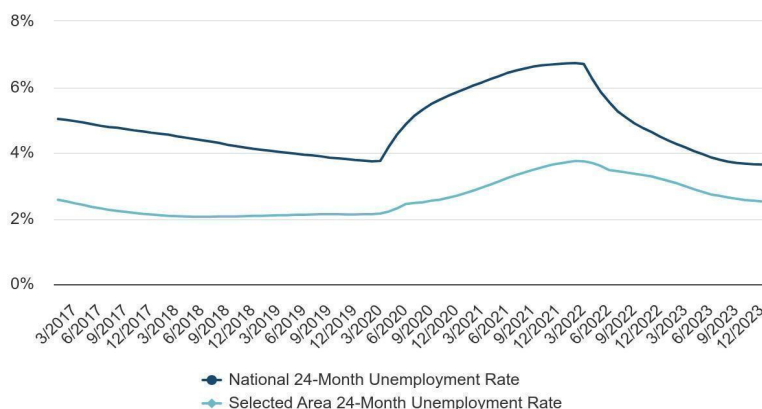


Table 12 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

77% of the Prime Age (25-54) Population is employed in the 6 County Region compared to 81% at the Colorado State level (25-54) which is significant due to the aging population demographics data. (Source: Argonne NERDE)

The unemployment trend for the past 5 years is similar to the past 24 months, but the Northeast Colorado Region was not nearly as affected by the peak pandemic unemployment with the national rate over 14% and the Region's just below 6% illustrated in the chart below:

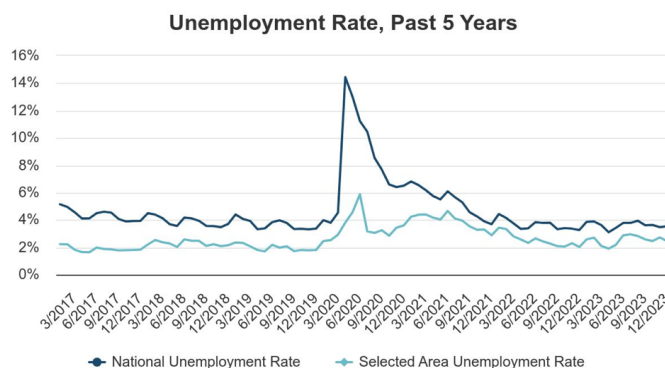


Table 13 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

HOUSING

In each county, there are nearly double the number of owner-occupied homes to rent occupied homes. Morgan and Logan Counties have the highest number of owner-occupied homes which is also likely due to the higher population density of those two counties. (Source: Argonne NERDE)

Mortgage as a Percent of Income

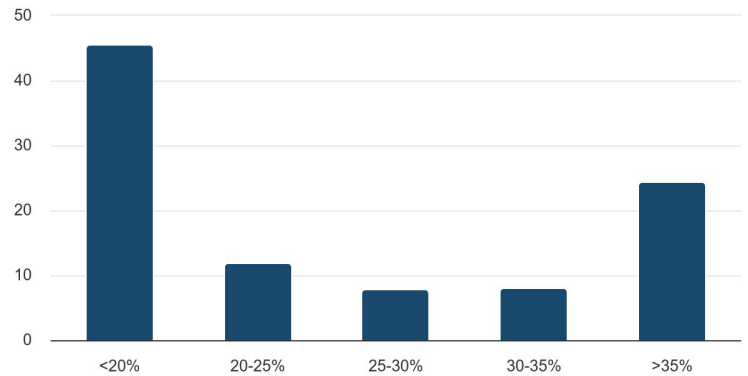


Table 14 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

Rent vs. Own

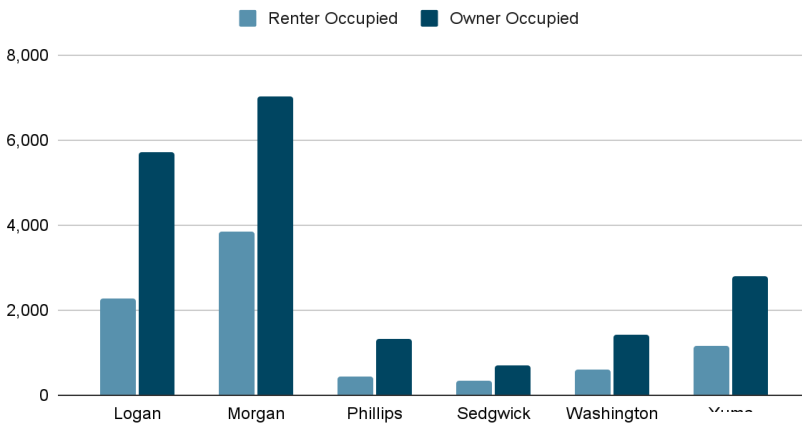


Table 15 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

The majority of renters pay rental rates approximately 35% of household income and the majority of homeowners pay a mortgage that is less than 20% of the household income.

Rent as a Percent of Income

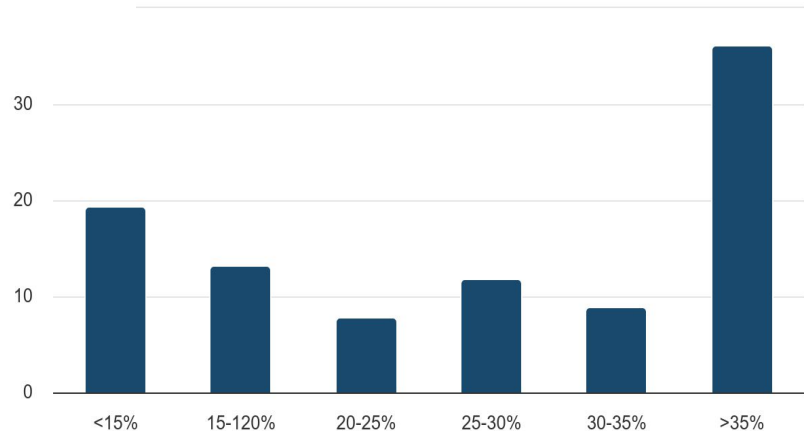


Table 16 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

CAPACITY

The State & Local Government Revenue Vulnerability Index measures the vulnerability of local government revenues by estimating monthly changes relative to a given baseline. Values less than 1 indicate losses for the 6 County Region. The 6 County Region (selected area) is relatively consistent and slightly higher than the State of Colorado- both improving since the pandemic; however, a steep drop for the state and a drop for the region are illustrated in the month prior to this publication (March 2024).

"THE SGRVI AND LGRVI MEASURE THE VULNERABILITY OF GOVERNMENT REVENUES BY ESTIMATING MONTHLY CHANGES RELATIVE TO A JANUARY 2020 BASELINE. REVENUES INCLUDED IN BOTH INDICES INCLUDE: TAXES ON PRODUCTS AND SALES, TRANSPORTATION AND HOUSING REVENUES, INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAXES, SEVERANCE TAXES AND ROYALTIES, AND PROPERTY TAXES. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUES ALSO INCLUDE LOCAL REVENUE FROM THE STATE REVENUE SHARING COMPONENT. IN ADDITION, THE MAIN INDEX FOR THE LGRVI FOR COUNTY-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS INCLUDES REVENUE ESTIMATES FOR SUB-COUNTY GOVERNMENT UNITS, INCLUDING MUNICIPALITIES, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND SPECIAL DISTRICTS. THIS REVENUE DATA IS AGGREGATED TO PRODUCE THE INDICES."

-ARGONNE NATIONAL LABORATORY'S NATIONAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE DATA EXPLORER (NERDE)

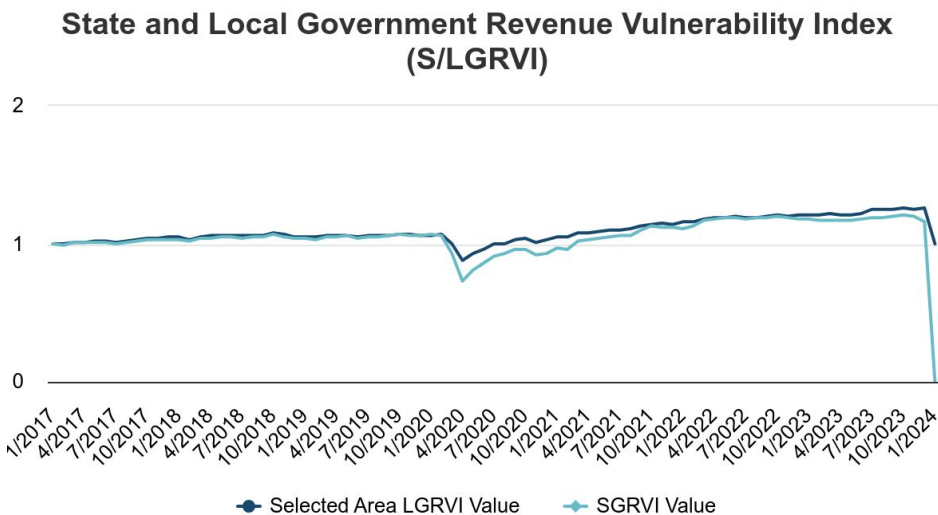


Table 17 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE/S/LGRVU

The Economic Development Capacity Index (EDCI) tool was also developed through a partnership between USED A and Argonne to help users analyze a county's overall economic development capacity, strength, and investment opportunities. These datasets help counties measure their capacity relative to the rest of the nation to inform planning, regional strategy, spending priorities, and how to best allocate federal funding. More than **53 economic indicators** are used to generate EDCI outputs to help determine a region's economic development capacities compared to the rest of the nation across five major capacity areas including financial, human capital, industry composition, infrastructure, and institutions & partnerships.

The information for each county in the County Summaries is included in Appendix A. The table below provides the percentiles and capacity level for comparison purposes, and while not an exact science, percentiles were prepared for the Northeast Colorado region. The table reflects the variability of the capacity index percentile scores, but the average of the counties provides some context for the capacity of the Region overall. EDCI indicators are provided on the county level only at the time of this report.

EDCI Percentiles and Capacity for Northeast Colorado

	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	NECO
Human Capital Percentile	0.39	0.26	0.48	0.25	0.35	0.48	0.36
Human Capital Capacity	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Financial Percentile	0.23	0.63	0.69	0.69	0.77	0.64	0.52
Financial Capacity	Limited	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Infrastructure Percentile	0.48	0.60	0.66	0.43	0.09	0.19	0.47
Infrastructure Capacity	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Limited	Moderate
Industry Percentile	0.59	0.74	0.27	0.06	0.38	0.24	0.38
Industry Capacity	Elevated	Elevated	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Elevated
Institutions & Partnerships Percentile	0.64	0.01	0.93	0.98	0.63	0.89	0.68
Institutions & Partnerships Capacity	Limited	Limited	Elevated	Elevated	Limited	Moderate	Limited

Table 18 SOURCE: Argonne NERDE/EDCI

PUBLIC FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The chart below provides the total financial assistance (grants) in dollars by county from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to Spring of 2024. Charts for each county are provided in the appendix. While representing a variety of programs, these indicators also illustrate investment in infrastructure. Additional infrastructure data is on the following page.

	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Regional TOTAL
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TOTALS (MARCH 2020 TO MAY 2024)	\$10,960,359	\$16,120,406	\$6,918,042	\$2,619,266	\$4,862,471	\$7,030,737	\$48,511,281

Table 19 SOURCE: CO DOLA Financial Assistance County Totals

INFRASTRUCTURE

Household Internet Access by Internet Access Index

The Internet Access Index identifies areas that could be considered broadband deserts where communities do not have quality access to the internet and therefore will find it more difficult to participate in an increasingly digital world. **0.18 for Sedgwick County to 0.27 for Phillips County.** (SOURCE: Argonne NERDE)

The chart to the right illustrates that 85% of Northeast Colorado residents work in the county where they live, 13% work in a different county in Colorado, and 2.4% work outside of Colorado. (SOURCE: Argonne NERDE)

With the information on work locations above, the methods of commute (illustrated in the chart below) are aligned for the percentage of residents who work in the county where they live—75.8% commute alone in a car. However, 11.8% carpool, and 4% walk or bicycle to work while 7.7% work from home. These statistics are significant in a post-pandemic environment with a national increase in working from home. There is limited commuting via public transportation which may be due to a lack of availability in the region and/or the low-density rural region.

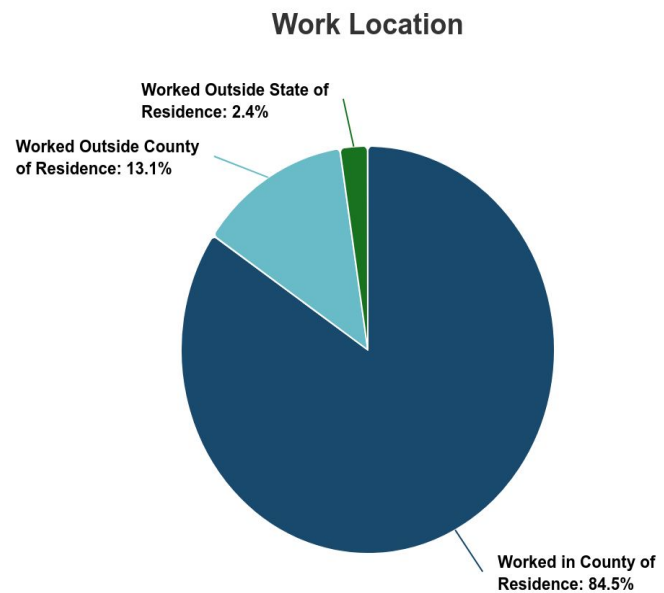


Table 20: SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

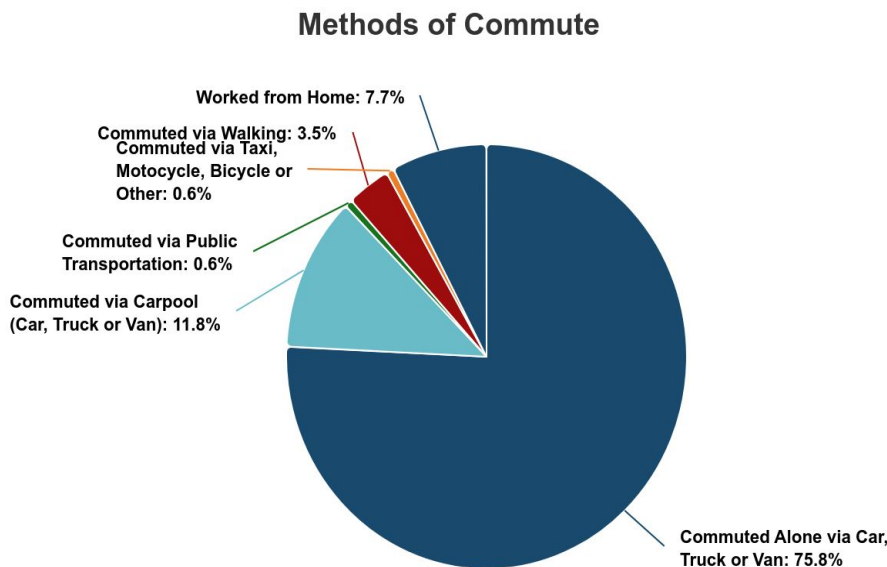
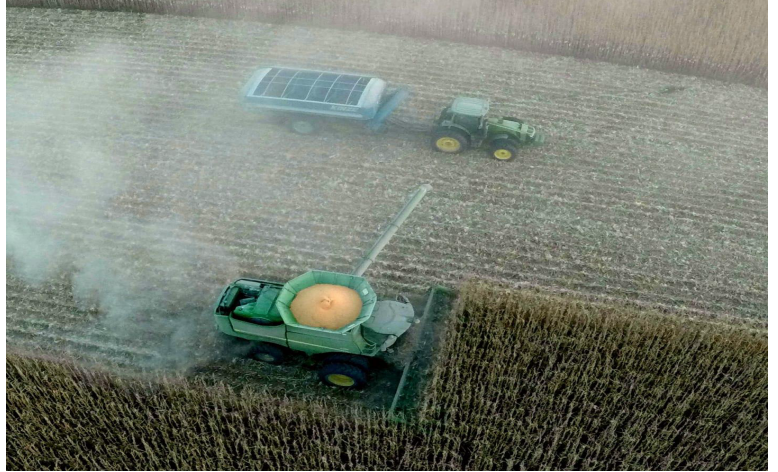


Table 21: SOURCE: Argonne NERDE

NATURAL HAZARDS RISK

The National Risk Index, built by FEMA, is a metric comprising 18 indicators to identify communities at risk for natural hazards. **The 6 County Region's National Risk Index is considered very low overall.** Logan, Morgan, and Yuma Counties were ranked as relatively low and Phillips, Sedgwick, and Washington Counties were ranked as very low. The State of Colorado, overall, is considered relatively moderate with risks of avalanche, hail, and cold waves as very high hazards in the State. The concern for climate resilience and economic resilience should not be underestimated. Challenges such as a global pandemic, sudden and severe loss of jobs in a major industry, sudden advances in technology making local industries obsolete, etc. are all examples of major economic disruptions. For example, in March of 2023, Governor Polis designated 23 Colorado counties as primary natural disaster areas due to a drought including Northeast Colorado.

The FEMA Community Resilience Challenges Index (CRCI) identifies resilience by percentile across the country. The value below is a ranking from 1 least resilient, to 100 most resilient according to 22 indicators of resilience. **Logan County is the least resilient and Sedgwick County is the most resilient with a Regional Average of 45** as illustrated in the table below:



	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	EST. REGIONAL AVERAGE
FEMA COMMUNITY RESILIENCE CHALLENGES INDEX	34	39	48	69	41	39	45

Table 22 SOURCE: FEMA CRCI/Argonne NERDE

Climate Risk & Resilience Portal, or ClimRR, provides future climate data to help us plan for and adapt to our changing world. Using one of the world's largest supercomputers, ClimRR models over 60 climate variables to provide the most sophisticated, free dynamically downscaled projections (RCP) for the United States. **ClimRR Climate Projections Change in Annual Maximum Temperature Average End of Century RCP for the 6 County Region is 3.3 compared to 8.5 for the State of Colorado.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

PLAN REVIEW & RESEARCH*

*Plans reviewed are listed in the appendix

THE PENDING COLORADO STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING CORE ISSUES; CORE OUTCOMES ARE HOUSING, WORKFORCE, INFRASTRUCTURE & BROADBAND, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, ECONOMIC RESILIENCE, AND CAPACITY. THE 2024 NORTHEAST COLORADO CEDS ALIGNS WITH THE PENDING STATEWIDE CEDS AT THE TIME OF COMPLETING THIS DOCUMENT.

STATEWIDE CEDS



WORKFORCE



GROWING INDUSTRIES FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: DENTAL ASSISTANTS, HVAC, NURSING ASSISTANTS, ACCOUNTING, AND BOOKKEEPING IN THIS REGION. GROWTH MAY BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE STRONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM.

THE POPULATION OF THE EASTERN SUB-AREA OF COLORADO IS MIXED. THE SENIOR POPULATION IS 14% HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. THE VETERAN POPULATION IS 28% HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

THESE 6 COUNTIES MAKE UP 6.6% OF TOTAL JOBS IN RURAL COLORADO, AND 5.5% OF TOTAL PAYROLL BUSINESS LOCATIONS. THE WORKFORCE IN THESE COUNTIES ALSO AVERAGES A SALARY OF \$2,120 LOWER THAN THE AVERAGE SALARY FOR RURAL COLORADO RESIDENTS.

MORE THAN 60% OF RESPONDENTS IN NORTHEAST COLORADO REPORTED THEY DID NOT THINK THEIR COMMUNITY WAS PREPARED FOR CLIMATE CHANGE COMPARED TO 47% STATEWIDE.

FEMA DECLARED A DISASTER IN AUGUST OF 2023 FOR SEVERE STORMS, FLOODING, AND TORNADOES IN THE REGION AND IS THE ONLY MAJOR FEMA NATURAL DISASTER DECLARATION IN THE PAST 5 YEARS.

IN 2016, THERE WAS A 30,000-ACRE PRAIRIE FIRE AND SEVERE HAIL AND FLOODING WITH MORE LOCALIZED SEVERE FLOODING IN 2015. IN 2013, THERE WAS A DISASTER DECLARATION FOR FLOODING.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE



TRANSPORTATION



IN 2022, CDOT COMPLETED 107 PROJECTS AND 538 MILES OF PAVED RURAL ROADS AND CONTINUED TO EXPAND THE SUCCESSFUL BUSTANG TRANSIT SERVICE, INCREASING FREQUENCY FOR BUSTANG AND OUTRIDER AND EXTENDING SERVICE TO NORTHEAST COLORADO.

LOGAN, SEDGWICK, AND YUMA COUNTIES ARE REPORTED TO HAVE HIGH TRANSIT NEEDS AND MODERATE TRANSIT NEEDS ACROSS MORGAN, PHILLIPS, AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES.

SEDGWICK COUNTY (69.5%) AND WASHINGTON COUNTY (63.3%) HAVE THE LOWEST ACCESS TO BROADBAND IN NORTHEAST COLORADO

LOGAN COUNTY (81.7%), MORGAN COUNTY (89.2%), PHILLIPS COUNTY (86.6%), AND YUMA COUNTY (84.8%) HAD THE HIGHEST ACCESS TO BROADBAND SERVICES.

BROADBAND



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

This CEDS planning process was inclusive, using multiple methods to include feedback from the public and private sectors throughout the state. The process also identified challenges with stakeholder engagement mainly due to its large and low-density populated geographic footprint. These challenges are addressed in the SWOT and Goals, Objectives, and Strategies. The planning process included outreach for feedback from county and local government representatives from across the region for the public sector context including in-person and virtual meetings. Throughout the planning process, there was intentional outreach to private sector representatives across the region for additional private sector context for challenges and opportunities in Northeast Colorado. While their feedback varied, there were clear consistent responses that stood out among all which supported the development of the SWOT Assessment.

This plan also utilized the input from the Northeast Colorado Roadmap which included the following key stakeholders in the graphic below:

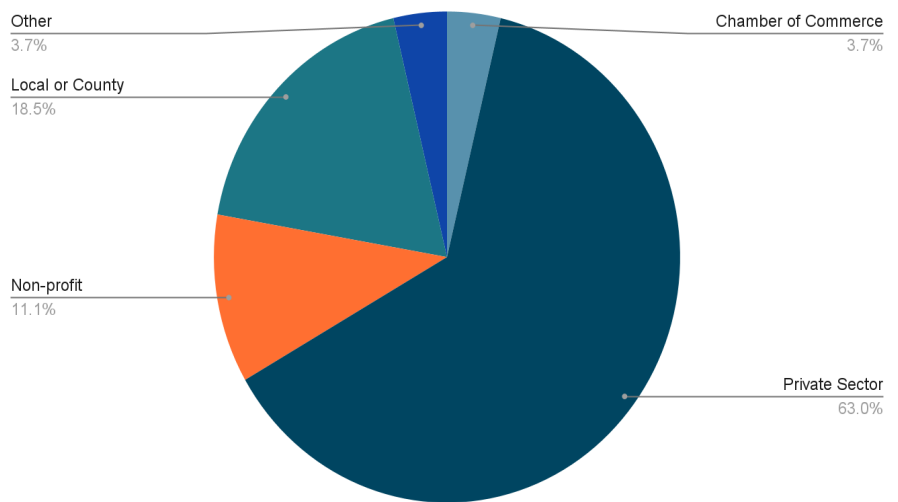
ROADMAP STAKEHOLDERS	
Morgan County	Fort Morgan Chamber of Commerce
Logan County	Logan County Chamber of Commerce
Yuma County	Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
Washington County	Haxtun Chamber of Commerce
Sedgwick County	Wray Chamber of Commerce
Phillips County	Sedgwick County Chamber of Commerce
City of Fort Morgan	Yuma Chamber of Commerce
City of Brush	Eastern Colorado Workforce Center
City of Sterling	Fort Morgan School District
City of Holyoke	Brush School District
Town of Haxtun	Haxtun School District
City of Wray	Holyoke School District
Town of Akron	Idalia School District
Town of Otis	Wray School District
Morgan County Economic Development	Liberty School District
Logan County Economic Development	Northeastern Junior College
Phillips County Economic Development	Haxtun Health
Community Economic Development of Sedgwick County	Melissa Memorial Hospital
Yuma County Economic Development	Wray Hospital & Clinic
	Centennial Mental Health
	Northeast Colorado Health Department

This plan's supplemental stakeholder engagement strategy included a survey with respondents representing every county in the region. The survey response feedback is consistent with feedback we received from our previous outreach. The charts on the following pages are representative of highlights from the survey, but additional context was provided.

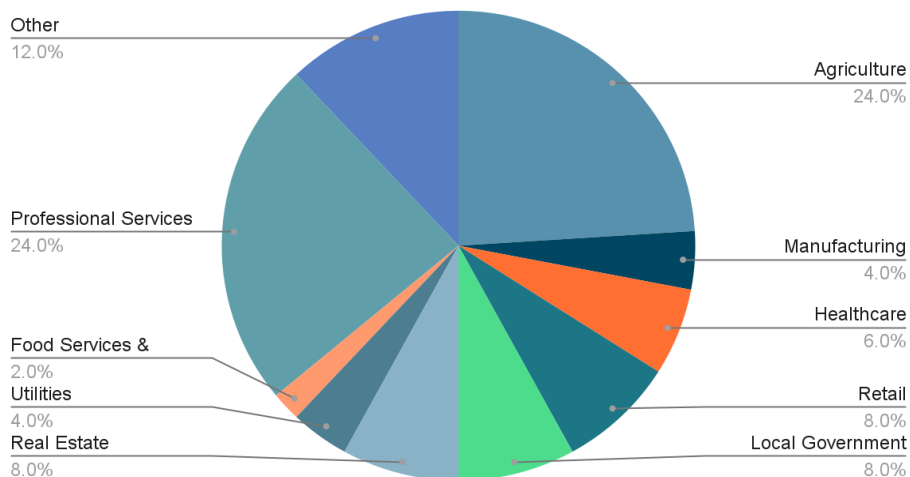
Most of the survey respondents were from the private sector, but other entities were represented as well:

The overwhelming majority of the survey respondents indicated that they were from the agriculture industry and the professional services sector. Those working in retail, local government, health care, and real estate sectors were the other significant industries represented by the respondents.

What type of organization(s) do you represent?

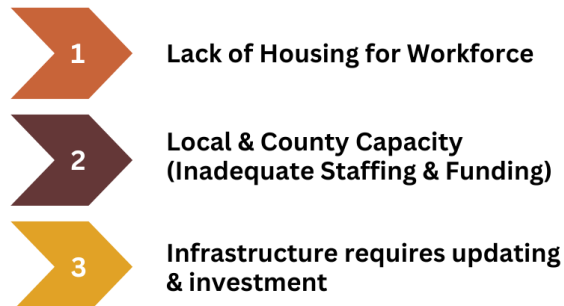


If applicable, what industry/ies do you represent?



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**, followed by **local and county capacity (inadequate & sustainable funding/staffing)** and **updated infrastructure** as illustrated in the graphic to the right.

TOP 3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BARRIERS IN NORTHEAST COLORADO



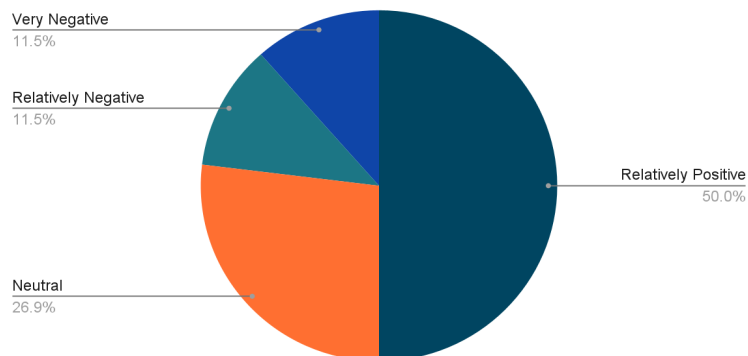
Survey respondents agreed that the top five **economic development initiatives needed in Northeast Colorado** included in the graphic below:

TOP 5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES NEEDED FOR NORTHEAST COLORADO



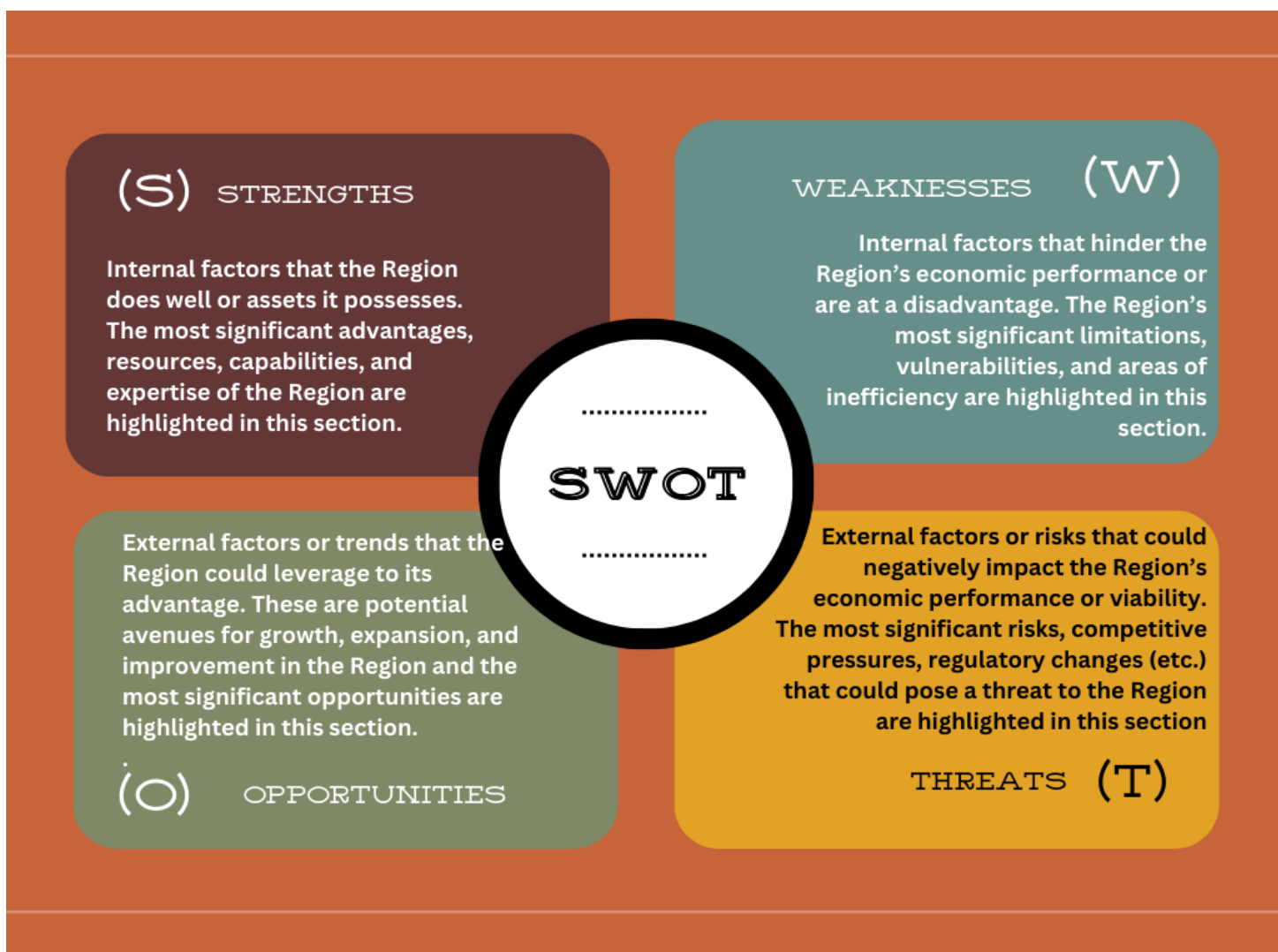
As illustrated in the graphic below, about half of the respondents have a relatively positive outlook for Northeast Colorado's economic future. About one quarter was neutral and the final quarter felt relatively or very negative about Northeast Colorado's economic future.

What is your Outlook for Northeast Colorado's Economic Future?



SWOT ANALYSIS

An integral part of formulating the CEDS is the evaluation of the Region's assets and challenges. Typically referred to as the SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats – the collective findings from the data analysis, comparative evaluation, background plan research, and stakeholder feedback provide the information necessary for this assessment. For the most part, the SWOT outcomes are the basis for many of the new initiatives or corrective actions outlined in this Plan's resulting Goals, Objectives, and Strategies, as they represent primary areas of focus needed to maintain the Region's viability and success into the future.





STRENGTHS

Vast & Robust Agriculture Sector & Culture

- Large Open sites for potential large-scale development
- Irrigated farm ground and general water availability

Safe & Good Community

- Low cost of living
- Rural lifestyle can be a draw to this area
- Close-knit community and neighbors

Proximity to Metro Denver

- Multiple highways
- Interstate access
- Expansion of Rail lines

Workforce Development Potential

- Strong community college system
- University partnerships in the area

Diverse Energy Resources

- Wind, solar, gas, hydrogen potential, and CO2 development presently

Environmental Risk is low

- Despite several serious natural disasters over the past decade, this region is considered “low risk” for disasters based on the past 5 years



WEAKNESSES

Low Density Communities

- Large distance between communities
- Lack of development-ready sites & properties

Housing

- Shortage of affordable housing and school systems to accommodate additional workforce
- Market too weak to support private sector housing speculation

Limited Financial Incentives

- Inability to meet matching fund requirements for grants
- Difficult for entrepreneurs to secure start-up funds or capital to begin projects
- High interest rates

Inability to Recruit & Retain Workforce

- Lack of amenities for workers in the region
- No loyalty between employees and management

Infrastructure

- Limited access to broadband compared to the national and state averages

Poverty

- The poverty rate for 2021 was 13% in Northeastern Colorado, 9.7% in Colorado, and 11.6% for the United States.



OPPORTUNITIES

Regional Industry Diversification

- Use current logistics & natural resources to match national demand and growth potential for distribution and food production
- Leverage renewable energy resources and existing infrastructure to attract industries that desire to collocate with those types of projects

Private sector informed workforce development

- Business management training for employees
- Recruit more people back to the region that have local connection (typically referred to as “diaspora”)

Support & Resources for Youth & Entrepreneurs

- Focused attention on vocational classes in educational system
- Financial support for entrepreneurs investing into the community

Federal and State Funding Opportunities & Resources



THREATS

Population Decline

- Loss of population in urban areas
- Lack of resources to sustain current residents
- Aging population higher than state and national averages
- Overall, NECO natural increase (births minus deaths) population is decreasing - the counties in NECO where this is an exception are Yuma and Morgan Counties

Water Scarcity

- Water resources demand and supply challenges
- Northeast Perkins Canal development

Government Policies Impact on Current Workforce

- State politics could impact beef cattle production, the Agricultural Industry in NECO
- “Big Box Stores” impacting small businesses
- Increased interest rates double small business’ interest expenses directly affecting their bottom line

Technological Disadvantages

- Electrification of vehicles and the inability to support in our rural grid and lack of facilities and services to support those machines

Regional Industry Diversification

- Reliance on agriculture as the main industry without diversifying within that industry or new industries

VISION & STRATEGIC DIRECTION

NORTHEAST COLORADO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION

This place-based, public-private sector driven Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy will serve as the foundation for actions to promote inclusive and resilient economic prosperity and wealth throughout Northeast Colorado

GOAL 1: Expand regional economic development capacity and collaboration

The momentum generated from this document is clear with stakeholders prioritizing that Northeast Colorado be designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the US Economic Development Administration. EDDs are intentionally designed to represent multi-jurisdictional regions where the designation will serve and represent the entire geographic area of the region. NECALG has demonstrated with this planning document that an EDD designation will allow for locally-driven economic development strategies on the regional level to leverage capacity, resources, and collaboration for successful economic development outcomes. An established EDD in the Northeast Colorado region will better position local and county economic development organizations and government agencies to attract federal funds and technical assistance through the EDD's efficient method to leverage regional collaboration and movement forward. This goal addresses the Roadmap's specific goal for a *Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS): Unlock access to federal and state funding to support regional efforts in workforce and economic development with a CEDS. The Roadmap recommended dovetailing their strategy's engagement processes and recommendations which this CEDS has accomplished.*

GOAL 2: Attract, train, develop, and retain a skilled workforce

A workforce development strategy is a comprehensive approach designed to enhance the skills, competencies, and abilities of the Region's workforce to meet the current and future needs of industries and the economy. Central to this strategy is the alignment of education and training programs with the demands of the labor market, ensuring that individuals are equipped with relevant skills that private sector employers seek. This involves multifaceted plans that include vocational training, apprenticeships, continuing education, and professional development opportunities, aimed at both the existing workforce and new entrants to the job market. Workforce attraction strategies will support any gaps that cannot be filled locally with training programs. Collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, private sector employers, and community organizations is crucial in identifying workforce needs, developing targeted training programs, and facilitating job placement. A successful workforce development strategy not only boosts economic growth and competitiveness, but also supports individuals in achieving meaningful employment opportunities, thereby enhancing overall quality of life and well-being.

GOAL 3: Support existing businesses and attract new businesses that will diversify the regional economy and generate job growth.

A business attraction and retention strategy is pivotal for local and regional economic development, aiming to draw new businesses to the area while ensuring the growth and sustainability of existing ones.

This strategy encompasses a variety of initiatives and policies designed to create a business-friendly environment that appeals to businesses from a targeted industry sector attraction strategy and established companies within Northeast Colorado. Key elements include providing access to financing and investment, ensuring a skilled workforce through education and training programs, and developing robust infrastructure to meet business needs. Effective marketing and branding of the region as an ideal place for business operations are also crucial. Additionally, fostering strong relationships with business leaders and offering personalized support services can significantly enhance retention efforts.

Collaboration among government agencies, economic development agencies, and the private sector is essential to identify and address the specific needs of businesses, thereby facilitating their expansion and contributing to job creation and overall economic prosperity.

GOAL 4: Entrepreneurship & Small Business Support

Supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses is vital for fostering innovation, driving economic growth, and creating employment opportunities. This support can take various forms, including access to capital, mentorship programs, and business development services that help navigate the complexities of starting and growing a business. Financial incentives such as grants and low-interest loans are crucial for alleviating the financial pressures on startups and small enterprises. Equally important is the provision of networking opportunities and platforms where entrepreneurs can connect with potential investors, partners, and customers. Educational resources and training workshops on topics such as business planning, marketing strategies, and digital transformation can empower entrepreneurs with the knowledge to succeed in competitive markets. Governments, nonprofit organizations, and private sector entities play a key role in creating a supportive ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurial ventures, ultimately contributing to a vibrant and resilient economy.

GOAL 5: Infrastructure & Site Readiness

Upgrading and expanding infrastructure for commercial and housing development is a critical endeavor that underpins sustainable economic growth and addresses the evolving needs of communities throughout Northeast Colorado. This comprehensive approach involves not only the construction of new and upgraded infrastructure and utilities systems, including broadband, but also the modernization of existing infrastructure to ensure resilience, efficiency, and environmental sustainability. By focusing on creating robust infrastructure, the Region can attract investment, support the expansion of businesses, and meet the increasing demand for housing. Strategic planning and investment in infrastructure facilitate the development of commercial areas and affordable housing, contributing to the creation of livable, accessible, and economically vibrant communities. Moreover, incorporating green infrastructure and smart technologies into these projects can enhance energy efficiency, reduce carbon footprints, and improve the quality of life for residents. Public-private partnerships and community engagement are essential in aligning these infrastructure projects with the long-term goals of economic development and social equity on return on investment.

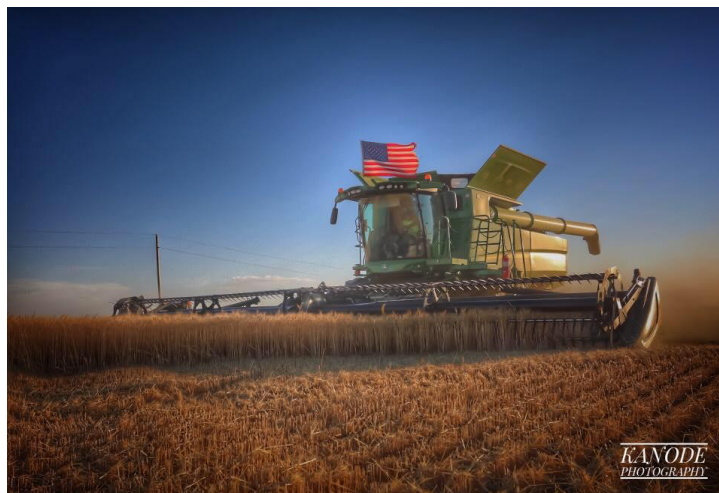
GOAL 6: Expand the Region's capacity to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major economic disruptions.

Economic resilience refers to the ability of the Region's economy to withstand, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses, such as financial crises, natural disasters, or global pandemics. This concept is not limited to the recovery to pre-shock conditions, but also the strengthening of economic systems to better face future challenges. The key to economic resilience is industry diversification, which involves spreading economic activities across various sectors to reduce dependence on a single industry. However, diversification can take place within an industry such as attracting advanced technology-based agriculture businesses to diversify the agriculture industry. Robust financial systems, responsive policy frameworks, and effective governance also play critical roles in building resilience by ensuring quick and efficient responses to economic disturbances. Additionally, investing in human capital through education and training enhances the adaptability of the workforce, further supporting economic resilience. Social safety nets can help mitigate the impact of economic downturns on the most vulnerable populations, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable recovery. Ultimately, economic resilience is about creating a sustainable and dynamic economy capable of navigating the complexities of an ever-changing global landscape and climate resilience.

In addition to addressing the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with this planning process, this plan also expands upon the Region's Roadmap recommendations with supplemental objectives and strategies for implementation. These recommendations are highlighted with each applicable goal for reference. The six goals presented in this plan are not siloed and many of the supporting objectives and strategies are interdependent throughout.

Following that the goals is an implementation matrix for this action plan that spells out objectives for each goal and strategies to achieve the objectives. Suggested champions/partners, estimated timelines, potential resources, and additional support organizations have been provided for each goal.

- **Suggested Champions and Partners** are provided for each goal so that one or more of the strategies is spearheaded by a dedicated organization/agency or partnership of one or more organizations/agencies. Since each goal includes multiple objectives and strategies, several organizations and champions have been provided.
- **The Estimated Timelines** provided may vary due to project prioritization (discussed in next steps), local capacity, and the announcement and runway time of the opportunities by the grantmaking organization.
- **Potential Resources** include examples of organizations and agencies that may be able to support one or more of the strategies for each goal. Specific Colorado economic development grants and capacity include but are not limited to the Colorado Economic Development Commission, Colorado Regional Economic Development Institute at CSU, Colorado Association of Regional Organizations, Economic Development Council of Colorado, and the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade. Federal and grantmaking agencies have been provided as examples. That being said, it is advised to research additional funding sources including agencies or organizations that are not typically associated with the project's scope of work. For example, the US Environmental Protection Agency includes funding for revolving loan funds and workforce development programs, but they have their criteria and goals that may or may not match.



Additional Potential Support Organizations are provided for context, but there are several other organizations that provide capacity, technical assistance, and funding. Many federal and state funding opportunities require a local share (a portion of the project budget) or may not meet the needs of a project's scope of work. National grantmaking institutions that can be identified through Grantsmanship Centers and philanthropic organizations and family foundations such as the Ford Family Foundation can be found through the Council on Foundations. There are also several Colorado-based philanthropies and foundations that can be found through Philanthropy Colorado and Foundations of Colorado. Examples of funding specific to this region include the Sterling Community Fund, Eastern Colorado Community Fund, and the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado. Many private sector organizations and businesses as well as nonprofits and universities provide assistance as well. It may be work researching the Colorado Nonprofit Association for partner organizations and other opportunities.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: EXPANDED REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY AND COLLABORATION

<i>Suggested Champions & Partners</i>	<i>NECALG, County Economic Development Corporations, County & Municipal Governments</i>
<i>Estimated Timelines</i>	<i>1-2 years</i>
<i>Potential Resources</i>	<i>OEDIT, DOLA, Governor's Office, USEDPA, USDA, Colorado Economic Development Commission</i>
<i>Additional Potential Support Organizations</i>	<i>National Association of Development Organizations, CO Align, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, Grow America (formerly NDC), Economic Development Council of Colorado, Colorado Association of Regional Organizations, Rural LISC (Colorado), American Farm Bureau Federation, Regional Economic Development Institute at CSU, International Economic Development Council</i>

Objective 1-1: Apply for Economic Development District Designation with the US Economic Development Administration for the 6-county area of Northeast Colorado

Strategy 1: When applying for USEDPA, work with the Colorado EDR to understand requirements in the short and long-term including associated funding and reporting.

Strategy 2: Develop an outreach strategy to expand the EDD's membership to new organizations and encourage diversity, including public, private, university, nonprofit, and local EDOs.

Objective 1-2: Regional Economic Development Organizational Development

Strategy 1: Establish a formalized organization or framework (legal operating agreement, etc.) with a CEO/Director and staffing plan and office location.

Strategy 2: Establish a diverse Board of Directors that includes representation from each county and has representation from the private sector.

Strategy 3: Identify resources for sustainable funding resources to support staffing, operations, and other budget expenditures.

Strategy 4: Maintain a list of participating regional business leadership and track broad-based representation, diversity, and involvement from the Region's civic, business, labor, and other economic development organizations.

Objective 1-3: Provide economic development capacity throughout the Region

Strategy 1: Collaborate with local EDOs, municipalities, and counties throughout the Region for funding and grant opportunities including appropriate options for local share/match typically required.

Strategy 2: Support the development of a central regional resilience office within the EDD that focuses on evaluating the alignment of funding opportunities, plans, regulations, and policies in the Region.

Strategy 3: Develop a coordination and collaboration strategy where EDD serves as regional liaison and convener among local, county, regional, state, and federal governments in addition to nongovernmental entities such as chambers of commerce and businesses.

GOAL 2: ATTRACT, TRAIN, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN A SKILLED WORKFORCE

<i>Suggested Champions & Partners</i>	<i>County Workforce Investment Boards, County Economic Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce, NECALG, Local Institutions of Higher Learning</i>
<i>Estimated Timelines</i>	<i>1-3 years</i>
<i>Potential Resources</i>	<i>USDOL, CO Dept. of Labor & Employment, OEDIT, USEDPA, HUD, USDA, CO Dept. of Education, US Dept. of Education, US Health & Human Services, Labor Organizations, Industry Organizations, Federal Reserve Bank, CO Dept. of Agriculture, Colorado Center for Rural Education, Colorado Workforce Development Council, CO Rural Jumpstart</i>
<i>Additional Potential Support Organizations</i>	<i>Grow America (formerly NDC), American Planning Association, Industry Organizations, Private Sector, Labor Organizations, Institutions of Higher Education, School Districts, Colorado Center for Rural Education, Center for Rural Inclusion, Project for Public Spaces, American Planning Association, Housing Colorado, Urban Land Institute, CO Business Experiential-Learning Commission</i>

Objective 2-1: Develop a collaborative targeted regional workforce attraction & retention strategy consistent with any applicable state or local workforce investment strategy.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with the state and regional workforce boards, agencies, labor organizations, industry advocacy organizations, etc. to identify target industry sectors.

Strategy 2: Ensure alignment and collaboration with the Colorado State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and regional workforce strategies..

Strategy 3: Collaborate with the private sector (industry specific) to prepare a private sector informed and targeted talent attraction strategy

Strategy 4: Prepare a private sector informed “Homegrown” (talent retention) workforce building on recommendations from the Roadmap.

Strategy 5: Develop a strategic regional private sector-driven labor shed assessment.

Strategy 6: Assess workforce synergies to expand the existing regional supply chain with public and private sectors.

Objective 2-2: Develop a workforce development program that provides equitable access to a spectrum of training programs across the region

Strategy 1: Continue to collaborate with stakeholders on alignment with existing workforce plans discussed in Objective 2 above, focusing on workforce development programs.

Strategy 2: Build on the labor shed assessment discussed in Objective 1.5 above and identify organizations (existing and potential) to support reskilling and up-skilling recommendations including the private sector, labor organizations, universities, vocational schools, etc.

Strategy 3: Based on workforce development gaps and needs identified, develop specific certification programs.

Strategy 4: Collaborate with workforce development partners, including elementary and high schools to create a region-specific resilient lifetime employment pipeline.

Objective 2-3: Building on the Roadmap’s recommendations, implement strategies that improve the “quality of life” that will support population growth, employment growth, and lower poverty rates than “quality of business” environment alone.

Strategy 1: Supporting recommendations in the Roadmap, conceptualize the region’s housing stock as an economic asset or tool that can be used to support local and regional economic developers’ mission and scope. Collaborate with and support community development and land use planners.

Strategy 2: Implement placemaking programs that enliven communities throughout the Region through cultural enrichment and social interaction programs unique to each community. Rural town centers often serve as the heart of a community’s public life. Placemaking is people-based; and while it is important to have visually appealing and functional public spaces, it is more critical that these same spaces are created by placing the community at the center of the design process.

Strategy 3: Rebuild senior centers to include community recreation centers that incorporate additional youth activity for physical and mental health opportunities and combine for mixed generational interaction and access.

GOAL 3: SUPPORT EXISTING BUSINESSES AND ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES THAT WILL DIVERSIFY THE REGIONAL ECONOMY AND GENERATE JOB GROWTH.

<i>Suggested Champions & Partners</i>	<i>Chambers of Commerce, County Economic Development Corporations, Industry Organizations</i>
<i>Estimated Timelines</i>	<i>1-2 years</i>
<i>Potential Resources</i>	<i>USEDA, USDA, DOLA, Governor's Office, American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, CO Office of the Council of Development Finance Agencies, Federal Reserve Bank, CO Dept. of Agriculture,</i>
<i>Additional Potential Support Organizations</i>	<i>Site Selectors Guild, International Economic Development Council, Rocky Mountain Trade Adjustment Assistance Center, National Rural Economic Developers Association, Rural LISC, Counselors of Real Estate, Private Sector, Industry Organizations, Manufacturer's Edge (Colorado MEP Center)</i>

Objective 3-1: Supporting Roadmap recommendations, develop a “Homegrown Business Support” (business retention strategy).

Strategy 1: Develop an action-oriented steering committee from across the region’s private sector, chambers of commerce, industry advocacy organizations, economic developers, etc. that focuses on ensuring the region’s business retention investments remain in Northeast Colorado to expand support for local ownership and control of wealth creation.

Strategy 2: Build out identified existing industry sectors by developing programs with input from identified industry sectors to determine methods that allow for mutual wealth creation and rise above local and regional business competition to benefit the sector and the Region as a whole. Concepts could include building out the supply chain and diversification within a sector.

Objective 3-2: Building on Roadmap recommendations and the research from Objective 3.1 above, develop a targeted Business Attraction Strategy to attract new businesses focusing on specific industry sectors.

Strategy 1: Build value chains in sectors and convene a spectrum of stakeholders from across the Region to identify targeted industry sectors to attract.

Strategy 2: Map out the value chain system and determine where the gaps lie and strategize collaboratively to fill them. Identify a network of people, businesses, institutions, and non-profits who collaborate to meet market

demand for specific products or services – each advancing individual self-interest while together creating greater local and regional wealth.

Strategy 3: Develop a strategy to work with site selectors. Site selection consultants are responsible for the majority of corporate location decisions and support companies in identifying the best location for talent, operating costs, office/plant options, and the like to help the Region identify and attract businesses and industries.

GOAL 4: ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

<i>Suggested Champions & Partners</i>	<i>County Economic Development Corporations, Locally Based Accelerators, Locally Based Institutions of Higher Learning, Chambers of Commerce</i>
<i>Estimated Timelines</i>	<i>2-4 years</i>
<i>Potential Resources</i>	<i>USEDA, USDA, USSBA, CO SBDC, DOLA, OEDIT, Governor's Office, American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, CO Secretary of State, CO Office of the Council of Development Finance Agencies, Federal Reserve Bank, CO Dept. of Agriculture, Greater Colorado Venture Fund, Colorado Venture Capital Authority</i>
<i>Additional Potential Support Organizations</i>	<i>SCORE, National Association of Development Organizations, CO Align, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, Grow America (formerly NDC), Economic Development Council of Colorado, Colorado Association of Regional Organizations, Rural LISC (Colorado), Center on Rural Innovation, Institutions of Higher Learning, Rocky Mountain Trade Adjustment Assistance Center, Kauffman Foundation, Colorado Bar Association, Colorado Bankers Association, Industry Organizations, Private Sector</i>

Objective 4-1: Support and expand upon the current start-up and entrepreneurship ecosystem to bolster new businesses.

Strategy 1: Establish an incubator/accelerator program to support member entrepreneurs.

Strategy 2: Establish a pro bono network of professionals, including accountants and attorneys, to provide free consultative services to entrepreneurs who participate in the incubator/accelerator program.

Strategy 3: Cultivate an innovation network that promotes the use of technology in economic development, providing go-to-market support, customized training sessions, C-level peer groups, and networking.

Strategy 4: Establish higher-education entrepreneurship classes or programs that combine a personalized approach with lessons learned from successful entrepreneurs and evidence-based best practices. This program prepares students to adapt, thrive, and lead in entrepreneurial roles with established companies, social ventures, and startups that ideally remain in the Region.

Strategy 5: Establish a coworking space for entrepreneurs with office space that connects to a community of like-minded entrepreneurs, mentors, and investors.

Objective 4-2: Develop a regional, accessible, and inclusive “one-stop shop” that incorporates existing programs and resources for small businesses.

Strategy 1: Identify services where organizations can provide technical assistance with unique issues for small businesses and start-ups such as the Small Business Development Center and formalize a satellite office in Northeast Colorado.

Strategy 2: Collaborate with organizations to provide training and awareness of resources for business and start-up planning.

Strategy 3: Provide resources at the business owner’s fingertips including required forms for business permitting, licensing, bonding, incorporation, etc. with a robust website associated with a business development center in Northeast Colorado.

Objective 4-3: Provide opportunities for access to capital for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Strategy 1: Provide technical assistance to build credit scores, assets, and collateral for financing through partner organizations and agencies.

Strategy 2: Establish Revolving Loan Fund/s to make loans to businesses that cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing. These loans provide access to capital as gap financing that enables small businesses to grow.

Strategy 3: Establish a major regional capital pool for sizable small business loans by tapping into programs such as the US Small Business Administration 7A Program.

Strategy 4: Work with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI), to create a local version of their Grow America Fund, which is partially guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration which is designed to provide flexible financing to small and mid-sized businesses in a community’s priority industry sectors providing long-term, flexible debt that can be structured with longer amortization periods than loans from traditional banks.

Strategy 5: Establish an angel investing/venture capital network raising funds for entrepreneurs in the Region. Pre-existing angel networks of a tech hub like Boston do not exist; however, a thoughtful approach can help identify potential investors.

GOAL 5: INFRASTRUCTURE & SITE READINESS

Suggested Champions & Partners

NECALG, County Economic Development Corporations, County & Municipal Governments, Eastern Transportation Planning Commission for Colorado, Locally Based Utilities

Estimated Timelines	2-5 years
Potential Resources	CO Broadband Office, CO DOT, USDOT, USDA, CO Dept. of Agriculture, US Dept. of Energy, US EPA, USEDPA, DOLA, OEDIT, Governor's Office, FEMA, CO Dept. of Public Health & Environment, Smart Colorado, Broadband USA, CO Office of the Council of Development Finance Agencies
Additional Potential Support Organizations	Counselors of Real Estate, Urban Land Institute, American Council of Engineering Companies- Colorado, National Association of Realtors, American Planning Association, County Assessment Offices, Private Sector, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, Grow America (formerly NDC), Rural LISC, Institutions of Higher Learning, Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Objective 5-1: Infrastructure Assessment for the highest and best use of funds and land and providing reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure.

Strategy 1: Implement an infrastructure inventory assessment to evaluate that may include, but is not limited to, utilities (water, sewer, electric, broadband, gas, etc.), roads, transit, and on-site improvements for a relatively simple inventory of existing or available infrastructure.

Strategy 2: Develop a project prioritization process specific to infrastructure projects (project prioritization for the overall recommendations is described in the Next Steps) based on a rubric that is customized to the Region.

Strategy 3: Prepare preliminary engineering studies which are typically required to fund a construction project. That being said, there are programs that will fund engineering studies as well as two-phase engineering studies with construction.

Strategy 4: Identify opportunities for local, regional, and state collaboration for funding opportunities through the state-funded Navigator program and/or similar program or incorporated as part of the mission for the new EDD.

Objective 5-2: Real Estate Assessment & Appraisals

Strategy 1: Convene a commercial and industrial real estate network for real estate appraisals to determine prioritization for land banking or buy-outs, etc. who work with regionally based and/or industry-specific real estate developers (professional real estate and industry organizations provide short-term free consulting and grants).

Strategy 2: As identified in business attraction Goal 3.2.3 above, work with site selectors strategically presenting sites for development.

Strategy 3: Provide access to existing infrastructure and shovel-ready lots/sites which was a key priority during the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) "Recharging our Community's Economy" workshop series.

Strategy 4: As discussed in access to capital Goal 2.3.4 above, work with a CDFI's financial products and investments to target the community's greatest needs and opportunities including real estate development.

Strategy 5: Leverage established programs such as those available with the US Environmental Protection Agency for brownfield remediation projects. EPA funds a variety of nationwide expert organizations to assist communities with brownfields issues. Technical assistance is available at no cost to communities as well as other related programs such as revolving loan funds and job training.

Objective 5-3: Establish Site Readiness Incentives to promote economic growth and stability by investing in the development or improvement of commercial and industrial sites to attract job-creating businesses.

Strategy 1: Establish a Site Readiness Incentive Program that provides grants, loans, or other economic assistance to qualified businesses or local governments that invest in constructing, renovating, or improving infrastructure for sites that will attract new businesses or expand existing businesses within the Region.

Strategy 2: Assess the impact of zoning ordinances, land use plans and policies, and building codes on the local, county, and regional levels.

Strategy 3: Develop a real estate tax credit program to finance housing and/or commercial real estate development projects.

GOAL 6: EXPAND THE REGION'S CAPACITY TO PREVENT, WITHSTAND, AND QUICKLY RECOVER FROM MAJOR ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS.

<i>Suggested Champions & Partners</i>	<i>County & Municipal Governments, NECALG, County Economic Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce</i>
<i>Estimated Timelines</i>	<i>1-3 years</i>
<i>Potential Resources</i>	<i>DOLA (Resilience Office in particular), Governor's Office, OEDIT, USEDPA, FEMA, USDA, HUD, USDA, CO Dept. of Emergency Management, CO Dept. of Agriculture</i>
<i>Additional Potential Support Organizations</i>	<i>American Planning Association, Urban Land Institute, National Association of Development Organizations, CO Align, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, Grow America (formerly NDC), Rural LISC, Industry Organizations, Institutions of Higher Learning, Private Sector, Chambers of Commerce, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, International Economic Development Council, Counselors of Real Estate</i>

Objective 6-1: Promote the importance of defining land use plans that enable each locality to attract a diverse mix of sustainable business, industry, residential, and recreational uses.

Strategy 1: Assist localities with their Comprehensive Plan updates that are focused on balancing economic development opportunities with the delivery of local government services.

Strategy 2: Encourage responsible land use and low-impact development practices to mitigate the negative effects of natural disasters and other major economic disruptions on residents and businesses that offer a saved \$6-7 per \$1 invested in mitigation. This also balances resources through sound management of physical development that enhances and protects the environment.

Objective 6-2: Develop and update planning, education, and mitigation activities on a recurrent basis, incorporating relevant studies and resources as appropriate.

Strategy 1: Establish an Economic Resilience committee of public and private sector members that will meet regularly to review established protocols and monitor the Region's readiness and vulnerabilities.

Strategy 2: Monitor regional, state, and federal funding programs to strengthen organizational capacity in times of stability and preparedness for disasters. (via the EDD in Goal 1 above)

Strategy 3: Expanding on Goal 5.1 above, assess infrastructure vulnerabilities, interdependencies, capability gaps, and the consequences of their disruption. Security and resilience assessments, combined with infrastructure planning programs and capabilities, form a holistic approach to enhance critical infrastructure resilience to all hazards.

Objective 6-3: Incorporate an economic resilience strategy and/or address the following key economic resilience factors:

Strategy 1: Although counterintuitive, consider targeting an industry sector that is not the easiest to develop and accelerates the process of economic/industry diversification.

Strategy 2: Prepare an industry diversification strategy and diversify within a major industry sector, related to, or completely unrelated to the existing prominent industry/ies.

Strategy 3: Implement "steady state" pre-incident initiatives that focus on long-term efforts to improve the community's ability to withstand or avoid shocks and have plans in place should a shock impact the area ideally focusing on strategic communications and backup strategies for a spectrum of stakeholders throughout the Region.

Strategy 4: As needed, convene stakeholders for response and recovery post-incident initiatives that focus on a community's ability to react in the short-term to shocks and recovery needs including access to resources, consistent and accurate messaging/communications, and response and/or recovery strategies implemented as appropriate.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION MATRIX

	Source	Regional Baseline	Desired Results	Actual Results
Economic Development District Designation				
County Economic Development Capacity Index (Human Capital) Average	NERDE/FEMA		↑	TBD
County Economic Development Capacity Index (Financial Capital) Average	NERDE/FEMA		↑	TBD
Government Revenue Vulnerability Index	NERDE		↑	TBD
Workforce/ Talent Attraction & Retention				
24 Month Unemployment	NERDE		↓	TBD
Per Capita Income	StatsAmerica		↑	TBD
Median Household Income	NERDE		↑	TBD
Income Inequality	GINI Index		↓	
Business Attraction & Retention				
Gross Regional Product	NERDE		↑	TBD
Economic Performance Index	NERDE		↑	TBD
Business Permitting	CO SOS		↑	TBD
Entrepreneurship & Small Business Support				
Access to Capital \$	CO CDFA		↑	TBD
% Small Businesses by # Employees	Census		↑	TBD
Infrastructure & Site Readiness				
Household Access to Internet	NERDE		↑	TBD
Infrastructure Investment/Grants (\$)	DOLA		↑	TBD
Commercial Development	County Assessment		↑	TBD
Economic Resilience				
Community Resilience Index	NERDE/FEMA		↑	TBD
ClimateRR Projection- Max. Average Temperature Difference	NERDE/FEMA		=	TBD
Location Quotient Average (dependence on one industry)	NERDE		↓	TBD

The metrics provided above will help the region better understand the performance of the recommended goals, objectives, and strategies. The list of datasets and demographic indicators are listed in the appendix. These indicators vary on the resource that provides the data. Many are updated in real time and some are annual. We have recommended that the evaluation be an average of the 6 counties for any given dataset. However, it will be useful to review the datasets for each county. Because this is a rural region, datasets typically used in more urban and metropolitan areas are unavailable for these counties.

When reporting performance metrics, it is suggested that an evaluation report of qualitative data be included to

provide additional context as the data may not reflect an accurate portrayal of the performance. Qualitative data refers to non-numerical information that describes qualities, characteristics, or attributes of a phenomenon. Unlike quantitative data, which is expressed in numerical terms and can be easily quantified and analyzed statistically, qualitative data provides deeper insights into the meaning, context, and subjective experiences associated with a particular phenomenon. This type of data is often collected through methods such as interviews, observations, and open-ended surveys, allowing researchers to explore complex phenomena, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. While quantitative data offers valuable metrics and measures for analysis, some aspects of human experience, emotions, cultural nuances, and social interactions cannot be fully captured or understood through numbers alone. Qualitative data enriches our understanding by capturing the nuances, subtleties, and complexities of human life and behavior, providing valuable insights that complement quantitative analysis and contribute to a more holistic understanding.



PATH FORWARD & NEXT STEPS

Turning Goals into Action

Even during the CEDS approval process, NECALG and the CEDS Working Group members will ideally share this document and/or its highlights with private and public stakeholders throughout the Region and state. Request to present the key takeaways of this document with different organizations either in person or online. Consider creating an online video that summarizes the plan to reach a broader audience. The NECALG CEDS approval process is described in the appendix.

When sharing, be as inclusive as possible by providing the document or a summary of the document in Spanish and share with organizations the committee is not familiar with. Finally, use social media with posts and videos online and be as creative as possible. Be sure to act and collaborate in the spirit of the recommendations.



The performance evaluation metrics not only provide stakeholders an understanding of the success, timelines, or help determine necessary changes in the strategy, but they are also required to report to USED A on a regular basis. Utilize an interactive web-based method and dashboard to illustrate the findings and recommendations with a variety of methods such as GIS maps, story maps, etc. The document will ideally be posted online and linked to the USED A-funded NERDE data dashboard which will be automatically updated by Argonne and USED A-funded Stats America dashboards as well. All data sets provided and recommended in the performance evaluation are listed in the appendix.

CEDS Strategy Committee & USED A Guidelines

A key element of the USED A-approved CEDS process is the “Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee (Strategy Committee also known as a steering committee).” Building on the current CEDS working group, NECALG will establish an official ongoing Strategy Committee that works as the principal facilitator of the CEDS process and is responsible for updating and developing future CEDS. The Strategy Committee should broadly represent the main economic interests of Northeast Colorado. The establishment of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee is a requirement only for EDA funded EDDs and Native American tribes. The USED A guidelines are provided in the appendix. NECALG and the CEDS working group should identify members of an official strategy committee even during the Economic Development District approval process. It is encouraged to work with your Economic Development Representative and other USED A staff with district designation and representatives from other state and federal agencies with project development.

Implementation and Strategic Project Prioritization Process

While a list of specific priority projects is NOT the intent of the CEDS or the planning process, it does not minimize the importance of adopting a project prioritization process. This includes adaptive and resilient planning and project prioritization tools including but not limited to:

- **Stoplight system:** Identify projects and initiatives that are complete or nearly complete, irrelevant due to new conditions, or have an outcome that is too abstract to report on. Categorize actions and projects into red: remove, yellow: keep in the pipeline, and green: prioritize the “low hanging fruit” (if appropriate) and clear priorities in the current environment.
- **Leading practices:** Utilize an assessment of projects and initiatives that are in line with leading practices across the nation but are customized to Northeast Colorado.
- **Project Prioritization Rubric:** Assess remaining projects and initiatives in a rubric with a ranking of Urgent to Not Urgent on one axis and important to not important on another axis. The rubric will further break down projects into:
 - TOP PRIORITIES: Vital projects with substantial urgency,
 - SIGNIFICANT PIPELINE: Critical Projects with minimal urgency
 - DELAY/DELEGATE: Pressing projects with negligible impact; and
 - INSIGNIFICANT REMOVE: Trivial projects with minor urgency

Further, identifying a specific strategy (project, program, action, etc.) for funding will need to ensure a specific champion has been identified and has the capacity to manage the project and any resources associated with it such as a grant. However, there are several organizations and agencies that can support with capacity and technical assistance. Multiple grantmaking organizations and agencies should be identified to leverage especially if there is a required local share of the project.

This document alludes to funding resources, but there are so many variables to consider with these additional action plan resources. The Objectives and recommended strategies are not a compilation of a “wish list” for USEDA to fund. (although it will be considered with project applications to USEDA to ensure alignment with this plan). This plan provides the Region with concrete justification required for other funding resources from local, state, federal, and philanthropic resources.



This plan should be reviewed on a regular basis and performance metrics should be tracked- not only to update USEDA and other agencies, but to determine how the recommended goals are performing by the EDD or formalized steering committee. Adapt this plan as deemed necessary. As Northeast Colorado’s economic development environment begins to grow, some goals, objectives, and/or strategies recommended in this plan may no longer be appropriate or a priority. As the economic development region builds its capacity, specific shovel-ready projects or clearly defined programs that align with the goals and objectives above may be considered and added to this plan if appropriate.