

Final Performance Progress Report

Grantee:	Colorado State University
Project Title:	Planning and Technical Support to Diversify Colorado Economic Opportunities
Project Number:	05-79-06066
Period covered by the report:	March 4 th 2021 – Dec 18th 2023
Reporting period end date:	Dec 18th, 2023
Report Prepared by:	Rebecca Hill and the Colorado State University Team

Progress towards specific regional need that the project was designed to address:

This project proposed technical assistance tailored to three regions of Colorado:

- The San Luis Valley Region – Explore alternative enterprises opportunities with a specific focus on the diversification of agriculture and food production enterprises
- Delta County and Northwest Mountains and Mesas Region – Technical assistance to frame recovery strategies for the tourism sector and expand the regional agritourism economy by helping food and beverage enterprises to diversify their business plans.
- Pueblo and Southern Colorado EDD region – Explore the feasibility of several agriculture and food supply chain infrastructure alternatives.

Over the course of the technical assistance grant we have made substantial progress towards these regional needs which is evidenced by the activities outlined in the high-level activities section that follows this section. As a part of this grant we have built collaborative programs through partnerships in each of the three regions of this technical assistance grant. Throughout the project we have been guided by community stakeholders to drive our focus, and have provided data, information, and economic analysis that communities have used to make informed decisions on matters that are important to their communities. In the broadest role, we helped to facilitate and compile community input from community conversations, both in Pueblo and the San Luis Valley. Then to address some identified priorities, we have been able to cultivate strong partnerships to frame and deliver educational and entrepreneurship programming. In Delta County, once an initial feasibility study did not offer much opportunity, we

helped the partner to refocus their work and completed a successful value-added food pilot. We have also partnered with local stakeholders to frame and conduct several studies evaluating the economic impacts of decisions around outdoor recreation provision and development. At a broader level, we have created data dashboards and county level data profiles that are accessible for any Colorado stakeholder and provided one-on-one assistance to communities in interpreting and using the dashboards when requested.

We have more recently been working with our grant partners and stakeholders to complete all the projects undertaken during this grant and provide a plan forward to support implementation once funding is completed. We have created valuable partnerships and are dedicated to continuing to partner and expand on the momentum that was initiated by this grant far into the future. In addition, as a direct result of the community driven research completed under this grant we had three graduate students complete their final Thesis or Technical Paper. This represents a contribution to professional development and new talent to support Colorado economic development efforts. The three projects were:

- *Exploring the Overall Distributional and Resiliency Implications of Investments in Rural Outdoor Tourism: The Case of Fishers Peak State Park (Skyler Shuck, Thesis), focused on San Luis Valley region.*
- *Tradeoffs Across Proposed Soil Carbon Solutions, Implications for Water Use (David Rice, Technical Paper), focused on SLV region.*
- *The Economic Contribution of River Recreation and Tourism in the Little Yampa Canyon, Colorado (Matt Burkard, Thesis), focused on the San Luis Valley region.*

It is interesting to note that these three students are now employed with the Colorado Governor's Budget office, the Bureau of Reclamation in Colorado and will continue work on economic projects with a Denver based consultant group.

High level overview of activities undertaken:

Below is a high-level description of some of the important activities stemming from this grant funding.

Data Dashboards -

Over the course of the grant, we designed and implemented a data dashboard for use by community stakeholders to access data in a digestible format on some of the key issues facing their communities. The current dashboard can be accessed on our website csuredi.org. In addition to providing the data on the dashboard (at the county level) we created one-page summaries of the data for each county which can be shared with stakeholders. These one-pagers provide data description to help stakeholders understand the data and facilitate discussion around the different topics. Some of the topics included in the data dashboards are:

- Housing Affordability
- Labor Productivity
- Commuting flows
- Non-employer and employer statistics by industry
- Establishment and job dynamism
- Coefficients of specialization

This effort involved several webinars and presentations to different communities to gain confirmation of the metrics design and better understand how the data is needed and how the dashboard and indicator reports would be used by communities. Feedback from communities has confirmed that the use of the metrics provided have supported successful proposals for grant funding for communities. Furthermore, feedback from communities was also incorporated into the development of additional metrics and visualizations after the preliminary version of the reports was discussed with several community members and extension agents. For example, The resident surplus and scaled resident surplus were developed in response to discussions with community members in Routt County who were curious about which of their local industries were most exposed to potential adverse shocks to commutability from neighboring counties.

The indicators were built not only for the focal regions, but also for every county in the state so the focal regions could understand not just their own economies but other potentially complementary counties as well. In that sense, the project helped bridge the rural-urban divide by allowing economically struggling rural communities to find complementary urban counties where supply-chains and partnership could be formed.

Pueblo Food Project Partnership -

The Pueblo Food Project is a program that was modeled in collaboration with the established CSU venture programs created and facilitated by the CSU Institute for Entrepreneurship. This program and partnership have been so successful that we believe it will lead to long term partnerships between CSU Fort Collins and the Pueblo partners for program delivery in future years. In addition, long term partnerships have been created between CSU Fort Collins, the Southern Colorado Innovation Link as well as the Pueblo Food Project. As part of this program, we have conducted the following activities:

- Supported the development of a food accelerator program for food entrepreneurs.
- Hosted educational workshops.
- Supported market research for food entrepreneurs.
- Created and facilitated connections in the food entrepreneurship space, including the creation of a mentorship program.
- Curriculum building and course facilitation on entrepreneurial concepts such as design thinking methodology, customer discovery, market analysis, branding tool sets, and pitching best practices.
- Compiled secondary data and developed content based on community conversations and task force groups to facilitate workforce and enterprise development planning and feasibility.

In total we had 22 participants participate in this program across 2 cohorts. Resulting in a continued partnership for future cohorts to utilize entrepreneurial curriculum.

Local Foods Economic Impact Calculator (<http://localfoodeconomics.com/>)

Beyond the support for entrepreneurs, another lesson we learned in our entrepreneur trainings is the challenge of framing a compelling story about food system investments to the economic development community. For this reason, we decided to update a tool we had created for the USDA previously, with new data that we felt would be useful to food entrepreneurs in our regions. In addition, we made a special calculator to support those who have brought double up bucks to their market (like Pueblo and SLV), and that tool will be published in 2024 at the same site.

Fishers Peak Economic Analysis:

The Trust for Public Lands reached out to our team to better understand the economic impacts of this brand-new state park, Fishers Peak in Trinidad, Colorado. Of particular interest to them as well as the city and other community stakeholders was how the development of the park impacts individuals from underserved backgrounds and the distributional effects of the economic impacts from the park. This research culminated in a completed master's thesis entitled, "Exploring the Overall, Distributional and Resiliency Implications of Investments in Rural Outdoor Tourism: The Case of Fishers Peak State Park". The study highlighted the potential the new state park offers to boost the economy of Las Animas County. It also highlights that traditionally economic benefits to regions from new tourism opportunities are not experienced equally by all members of the community and explores the overall distribution income effects of the State Park. It offers insights into how different development approaches may affect community outcomes. The timing of this study is such that the park planners can incorporate the lessons into the future planning for the state park and affiliated economic development initiatives and investments.

Rural Conversations: Loving our Land Panel

Partnering with Colorado Humanities and building on the relationships we created while working on the Fishers Peak project we presented a panel called Rural Conversations: Loving our Land. We invited four speakers to a very well-attended webinar. Our speakers were:

- Heather Knight, Associate Director of Practice for the Western Collaborative Conservation Network
- Mike Lester with the Colorado State Forest Service
- Sonja Chavez with the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservation District
- Wade Shelton with the Trust for Public Land

For more information on this panel please visit the Change in Rural Colorado Conversations website: <https://coloradohumanities.org/programs/change-in-rural-colorado/> where that conversation and the rich Q&A session are posted.

Pivot Pueblo County

In addition to our Pueblo Food Partnership Trainings, we also provided a training for entrepreneurs called Pivot Pueblo County. Our goals in working with Pivot Pueblo were to support the long-term stability of local businesses and organizations due to the challenges faced by the COVID-19 outbreak. Engaging content around changing consumer habits and new health requirements, has required many businesses to pivot their business model to adapt to the changing times. Overall, we had 3 cohorts, and 50 individuals interact with our Pivot Pueblo materials. To help with this aim we conducted the following activities:

- Facilitated interactive course development and implementation to improve resilience of businesses - business owners were offered two versions of this content to diversify the types of businesses interacting with the content. Each cohort is granted access to rewatch the content for one year on the Canvas learning platform.
- Hosted a virtual workshop to support local business to pivot their business model some topics covered were: New value propositions to diversify revenue, increasing engagement with local resources including SBDC
- Pivot Jumpstart which hosted live, interactive sessions on the CSU campus as well as the MOSAIC which is a hybrid learning classroom. This is self-paced; they watch the video modules online and then attend facilitated workshops on the topics.

Start-Up Pueblo

With Start-Up Pueblo we worked to cultivate a community of entrepreneurs within the city of Pueblo, this was a once-a-month meeting with entrepreneurial speakers presenting their stories and areas of expertise. These monthly sessions were educational but also served as networking sessions with entrepreneurial leaders and supported community creation within the entrepreneurial community while connecting entrepreneurs to local resources. In total we had 30 individuals participate in our Start-Up-Pueblo activities every month with about 10 community members consistently attending. Other activities under this project include:

- Post event book club to encourage continued engagement and network among participants.
- Local team was created to continue the implementation after our team's efforts were winding down, knowing we would continue with a long-term Extension presence.
- Partnership between Startup Pueblo and Pueblo Food Project planning committees

Rio Grande Water Conservation District (Sub-District No. 1)

Water levels in the unconfined aquifer under the jurisdiction of Sub-District No. 1 are declining. Prolonged drought has greatly reduced inflows and surface water diversions into the sub-district territory and are leading to groundwater withdrawals exceeding the total amount of recharge. Since its inception in 2011, Sub-District No. 1 has put in place economic incentives to encourage voluntary reductions in groundwater use with the goals of achieving and maintaining a sustainable aquifer. Unfortunately, voluntary groundwater reductions to date have not been

sufficient to prevent aquifer decline. If the aquifer levels continue to decline, the State Engineer will not be able to approve a future Annual Replacement Plan, resulting in the curtailment of Sub-District wells. These curtailments will have a severe negative impact on individual producers, and the agricultural economy of the region. As the Sub-District has been focusing on achieving sustainability through economic disincentives to reduce net groundwater consumptive use, at their request we conducted an economic analysis of the variable water fee they would have to charge to incentivize decreased use. The board has used this information in its planning going forward for the district.

Website (<http://csuredi.org/eda/>)

As part of this project, we wanted to make sure and have a forward-facing website to communicate with stakeholders in our selected regions. The website includes information on the grant team, our partners as well as grant objectives. We have created separate pages to highlight the work that we have done in each of the three project regions. The website helps to facilitate early discussions with new partners as they are referred to us or we are brought together for collaborations. The website has also been used to host our data dashboards and county profiles. While the website used to be a standalone site, now that the technical assistance grant is ended we have moved the materials from the grant as a separate page on our Regional Economic Development Institute webpage (csuredi.org).

Delta County Contract: Originally, Delta County prioritized a feasibility study to explore an Individual Quick Frozen (IQF) plant for their producers who had seconds and were interested in creating a new value-added market. The initial study showed little promise, but we still had resources for implementation, so we decided to explore other options. Since Delta County had identified the frozen and dehydrated market as a potential new market channel for fresh products out of the region and they are looking to develop marketing and production implementation plans to bring together the right operational and ownership partners in a public-private partnership effort, we let potential producer-partners help to identify new directions. They helped to frame and provide in-depth exploration of alternatives to build and operate a frozen and dehydrated food manufacturing facility. Our work in framing and guiding this pilot included:

- Met with growers to reconsider a new pilot processing facility based on scale-appropriate dehydration equipment and markets that may be available
- Since no producer was interested in leading as the private entity of the partnership, we explored another pathway: a partnership with the Food Bank of the Rockies in Grand Junction (adjacent to Delta County).
 - The updated goal was to provide better market opportunities for producers if their seconds are sold for alternative uses, while also providing access to more healthful options for the Food Bank clients.
- The Food Bank was supported through a cost-share on purchase of equipment needed to expand dehydration, labeling for markets and the labor to conduct and track data on test batches.

- Four producers had the chance to pilot production. They were compensated for their product as a means to account for the time they spent setting up logistics and tracking data for the pilot.
- In addition, one producer with their own smaller facility tracked similar data so we had a way to compare the costs and labor of a producer doing such value-added activities with their own labor vs. use of the Food Bank facility
- We wrapped up all data collection from producers and the Food Bank in mid-October and are now analyzing/summarizing.
- The consumer feedback surveys on individual dehydrated products were conducted throughout November and December at the CSU SPUR campus in Denver. A technical report on findings is being shared with producers in Spring 2024 and a summary report will be posted on the CSU REDI website as a REDI report after it is shared with producers.

Downtown Colorado Partnership

As part of our partnership with Downtown Colorado we led a community brainstorming about a variety of investments that could spur community economic activity at the intersection of new public facilities, recreation, the arts and the food economy. Community leaders benefitted from the experiences and expertise of a set of community and economic development leaders in the audience. The report for this effort can be found [here](#):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nTvs2ue6lZ4kPAUiQyLB4tfP6WcchwZv/view>

- Center, Colorado in the heart of the San Luis Valley has been the focus of our early work in this space, and the community continues to move forward on a variety of projects to rebuild the main street and create new public infrastructure
- Provided market level data on the economic landscape for entrepreneurs in the region
- Supported Downtown inc. in the planning and implementation for the SLV Entrepreneurship Summit - connected entrepreneurs to one another and provided resources to strengthen regional networks and opportunities to collaborate (see more detail below).
- Hosted an intensive small workshop to dive in and build solutions and options for entrepreneurs to interfaces with lenders, training providers and each other.

Adams State Food Entrepreneurship

Partnered with Adams State University to explore options for a food entrepreneurship program in the San Luis Valley in June 2023. Earlier we had connected with Adams State to explore options for a food entrepreneurial program to be offered in the San Luis Valley, but they had chosen to run their own program. The Recipe to Reality Program offered by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was selected and will provide the training needed for entrepreneurs in the valley. However, in June 2023, they hosted a Summit to talk more broadly about opportunities and the CSU team was there to present Economic data for the region, summaries of what has been learned in regional food assessment discussions (see below for more details) and share

what we can support for the outdoor economy entrepreneurs in the region (showing breadth beyond food entrepreneurs).

Fibershed Project

Partnered with other Colorado State University researchers looking to map the Colorado Fibershed to include hemp in their analysis. Hemp is an emerging and important crop in Colorado, particularly to the San Luis Valley region of the state (one of our key focus areas for this technical assistance grant). Little is known about the fiber resources produced in rural communities. More information, which we collect for this project, will advance and expand the local fiber supply chain and provide economic development opportunities for the region.

San Luis Valley Community Food Assessment

The San Luis Valley conducted a community food assessment this year but did not have enough budget or human resources on their team to thoroughly collect and analyze the data needed to form the community food assessment. We were able to not only serve on the steering committee for this process, but also assist them with the community discussions and theme analysis of the data. The purpose of this project was to explore the impact of the food system on health, economic opportunity, and quality of life for the region. In addition, the project allowed them to discover potential projects and priorities for the region. A goal of this project was to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in the food system and to assist in strategic planning such as the creation of an emergency food plan, identify economic opportunities and gaps as well as collect and summarize relevant secondary data. The final report for this project is available at: <https://slvlocalfoods.org/cfaa/>.

Region 10/Olathe Community Steering Committee:

One Co-PI as well as a specialist from the Institute for Entrepreneurship served on the steering committee and provided other assistance with community discussions surrounding an innovation center and entrepreneurial programming. As a part of this project, we explored the potential impact of an innovation center including economic opportunity, small business resources and potential projects an priorities for the region. Our team provided REDI built indicators which were used to inform a grant proposal submitted by the community with the USDA (which was funded). Facilitated the construction of a business incubator, with entrepreneurs being targeted especially in the Hispanic community. The noted Co-PI also served on Region 9's economic development committee to glean more information about potential linkages with Region 10. The meetings also served to highlight possible gaps in Region 10's own economic development planning.

Little Yampa River Project (BLM Little Snake Field Office)

The Bureau of Land Management reached out asking for technical assistance to help them explore the economic impacts of a land purchase on the Yampa River which would expand recreational opportunities and protect critical habitat in the area. Results of this analysis will help them communicate to local stakeholders the economic implications on the region if they were to

purchase the land and to weigh the different options available to them. This project ended in a completed Master's Thesis by Matt Burkard entitled, "The Economic Contribution of River Recreation on the Little Yampa Canyon, Colorado". The Yampa River is a key driver of outdoor recreation opportunities in the Craig community. Opportunities to enhance access are important to this region to diversify its economic portfolio considering transitions occurring in the energy and agricultural sectors. This research provides information for stakeholders on the economic implications of a land acquisition proposal by the Bureau of Land Management to expand public access to the Little Yampa Canyon.

For a short, outreach-oriented summary of the results from this study the REDI report can be accessed here: https://csuredi.org/redi_reports/the-economic-contribution-of-river-based-recreation-in-the-little-yampa-canyon-colorado/

Tradeoffs of Soil Carbon Solutions

Water and conservation issues are at the front of mind in the SLV region and a variety of conservation options will be important to solving problems going forward. Climate smart grants are being awarded across the state and CSU is involved in four of these projects. This research will help the SLV compare different conservation options available to them. In the project we explore how farmers will adopt climate smart or conservation practices and how these conservation payments might affect the regional economy (with a specific focus on the SLV region or Colorado). This research project resulted in a Master's Technical Paper by David Rice entitled, "Tradeoffs across Proposed Soil Carbon Solutions, Implications for Water Use".

Agritourism Website Development

Agritourism can be an important tool for producers to diversify their incomes and become more resilient, but regulations vary by County and regions and have large implications on the success of an operation. For this project we assisted in the creation of a one stop website where agritourism operators can learn of the specific relevant regulations in their specific County. This project originated at the request of Western slope producers, who currently lead the state agritourism association, who have encountered land use, zoning, licensing and other obstacles in opening or expanding value-added businesses based on a primary agricultural operation. And was conducted in collaboration with the Colorado Agritourism Association to develop, Colorado Agritourism Business Environment Resources, a new online resource library and tool to access information more easily on the business regulatory environment. This tool aligns with the Northwest region's request for more business support for those exploring agritourism opportunities and will assist in business planning and development as well as provide new income sources for agricultural producers in the state. The site is now available at: <https://coagritourismbiz.org/>

Southern Rocky Mountain Agricultural Conference (SRMAC)

Organizers of the Southern Rocky Mountain Agricultural Conference (SRMAC) reached out to us to help them understand the economic impacts of this important event on the community of

Monte Vista as well as the larger region. They are also interested in understanding how the community can increase the economic impacts that the community retains from this event. We conducted an economic impact analysis, produced a white paper and made several presentations in the community to the San Luis Valley Commissioners as well as the Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce.

Rifle Mountain Park

The Rifle Mountain Park is an important tourism opportunity in the region that brings a variety of recreation (including climbing, hiking and biking). The community has traditionally collected a tax to go to park improvements but is looking to communicate to stakeholders the economic benefits their community investments in this park have had. We created a survey instrument to evaluate the economic impacts and contributions of the Rifle Mountain Park to the community and conducted in person intercept surveys of recreators. Results of this economic impact study will be presented in December 2023 and help local stakeholders make decisions related to future improvements to the park.

Relationship Building:

One of the outputs of this grant was relationship building and strengthening of networks across the regions. We spent a significant amount of time building relationships across the regions. Some of the relationships created resulted in projects that have been highlighted in this annual report. Other relationships, while they did not end up in curriculum development or economic analysis, were still valuable outcomes from this project and some of these activities are outlined below:

- Continue to engage with stakeholders in Center to prioritize some short-term strategies and long-term plans for new city initiatives. This highlights one of our newest partnerships with Downtown Colorado Inc, with Dawn Thilmany now serving on their Board to sustain that collaboration
- Held initial discussions with other economic development and tourism leaders in all regions related to affordable housing, redevelopment of existing commercial assets and new business development initiatives
- Created new internal CSU partnerships with CSU Online to increase efficiencies in program registration and additional extension offices to share and provide a local representative for participants to reach out to for the best resources and connections to those on campus. For example, the Institute for Entrepreneurship is now embedded in the CSU Collaborative of Engaged Centers and active in the Extension Forum so that their programs can be more easily connected with community needs.
- Economic Development Council of Colorado - Plenary session at the annual conference. Education on key food systems issues in the region and how they are connected and related to economic development
- SBDCs were commonly used as content and recruitment partners for the entrepreneurship programs and we are exploring how to better collaborate in regions we both have programming

- Valley Food Partnership - Beginning Farmers Program, provided guidance and assessment support for their Spring 2022 Beginning Farmers Program and one of their members was a pilot producer for the Delta dehydration project.
- Naturally Boulder provided guidance, judged business plan presentations and helped us with the Colorado Collision, bringing food entrepreneurs from across the state to SPUR in summer 2023.
- RISE grant (with Region 10)
- Lake County shared kitchens - we were approached by the county to explore community kitchen options for a church facility that invested in a commercial kitchen, and helped them acquire the Shared Kitchen Toolkit to guide their investment decisions.
- Just Transitions Community Assistance - Cities in Northwest Colorado are looking for opportunities to provide employment for workers as they transition from coal mining as plants close in the region.
 - Approached by the city of Craig to help provide data and information to better understand the economic effects of developing an industrial park.
 - Also approached by Meeker with a similar request for their riverfront project
 - These new partnerships were at the heart of and motivated the economic impact studies listed above
- Visioning a Sustainable Colorado Outdoor Recreation Economy (SCORE) - work to coordinate our work related to outdoor recreation with the work that they are doing, attending and present at an outdoor economy conference in Montrose to future explore the technical assistance role we can plan in their community initiatives. The outdoor economy is important and CSU is doing work in this area but working more collaboratively we can make more of an impact on communities that are highly dependent on outdoor recreation.
- Craig Community Building Masterminds - Host interactive workshops to develop entrepreneurial thinking and skill sets among local leaders.
- Apprentice Program Development - Provide support for the development of two apprenticeship programs. These programs will partner with CSU in a longer term way than our entrepreneurship trainings.
- Explored ways to integrate drone data collection into new climate smart marketing initiatives. If producers are able to verify improvements in various water, soil and climate metrics, they may be able to secure market premia for their production. We were finally successful in helping this company to get integrated into broader CSU technology partnerships.
- Colorado Collision Food Pitch Competition Partnership - Support statewide food startups by elevating their visibility and interactions with potential buyers (with Naturally Boulder and StartUp Colorado). 95 person event hosted at CSU Spur for 10 businesses to showcase their food product. Beyond sales, multiple businesses received business pitch mentorship and resources. Additional sponsorship allowed for financial prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place.
- Celebrating Colorado Wine Seminar - Exploring experimental tourism events for the state. Given increasing interest in outdoor tourism, regional farms, food businesses and beverage enterprises. Explore feasibility, pilot and assess experiential tourism event.

Lessons learned that may be of assistance to other communities undertaking similar efforts:

While we were able to create lasting partnerships and reach the objectives that we were hoping to cultivate with this project, we did encounter some challenges along the way. These challenges became lessons learned; we share them here in hopes that it may help other communities who may face similar challenges in their efforts.

First, the project start date was much later than we initially anticipated. Because of this later start date, we had to work closely with each of our partners to develop new dates and timing on programs and deliverables. The closer the existing relationship with the partner, the smoother this went, but for newer community relationships it took time to rebuild the trust and move forward with our projects.

We also experienced several challenges with the grant subcontract with Delta County. The staff person who we were working with while writing the grant left the organization. We had to reassign the workload with this subcontract relationship within the organization. Next, after completing a Phase one feasibility study of the project, it was discovered that the processing facility of interest showed little promise for the industry. In partnership with a wider set of CSU Extension colleagues, we chose to pivot Phase 2 to another value-added product opportunity and believe we framed a strong new partnership and a pilot with a non-conventional partner in the region, the Food Bank of the Rockies, which we believe is very likely to be sustained.

In some of the communities we had hoped to support entrepreneurship trainings and workshops we experienced challenges finding dates and locations that worked for local partners and their stakeholders. At each step of the coordination for these trainings we have worked closely with local partners to make these truly community supported events. We will continue to build our partnerships in the San Luis Valley as well as Moffat County to continue to support conversations and events that build partnerships and local capacity in the long run.

Expected/actual economic benefits of the project:

Many of the projects undertaken for this grant involved the evaluation of the economic impacts of programs, events, and potential investments. All these projects originated from community requests for this information. The information we provided in these studies is being used by these communities to make more informed decisions on resource allocations and strategic planning, which in turn will have positive economic benefits to their respective communities.

Because of the relationships built and projects completed in this technical assistance grant, we made the decision to apply for an EDA University Center, as the state of Colorado has never been host to one of these valuable technical assistance centers. We were fortunate enough to be awarded the EDA University Center and will be able to continue our efforts to support Colorado Communities. In addition, through our work with ag and food partners, we were able to compete for one of the new USDA Regional Food Business Centers on behalf of the Northwest

and Rocky Mountain region (with 5 other state partners), which will allow for an elevated and continued level of technical assistance for food entrepreneur programs in Colorado. The Center's mission and activities are shared at its website:

<https://nwrockymountainregionalfoodbusiness.com/>.

The communities that have received technical assistance from us through this grant have also been successful in securing further funding for their efforts. For example, the counties of Delta and Montrose selected Olathe as a target for a USDA Entrepreneurship grant. The counties came to us compile and frame data to better understand their current economic structure, with the idea of eventually targeting value-added agriculture clustering in their region. We advised them on the state of agricultural manufacturing in the counties, using tools we developed on concentration and growth of sectors. They used these tools as a principal motivator for their grant proposal which was funded. We have been and continue to serve on the Connexon steering committee, to discuss and inform the communities on their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Our entrepreneurship training programs were a large success, especially in the Pueblo region, and we expect there to be lasting economic benefits as a result of these programs. Many of the business owners that participated shared how impactful the program has been on their business and their long term resiliency. One business owner shared, "I am pivoting my business as we speak. With the help of the SBDC I feel confident I will succeed." After the launch of Pivot Pueblo and meeting with local stakeholders the challenge of finding programming for business planning and COVID recovery was identified. The Pivot Jumpstart Program was created in Larimer County by CSU College of Business Faculty to support the long-term sustainability of local businesses and organizations, due to challenges faced by the COVID outbreak. We believe that engagement with our content around changing customer habits and new health requirements allowed many businesses to 'pivot' their business model to adapt to changing times. Each of these programs was created in partnership with local organizations who will continue to operate in their communities. Some of these partners include: Southern Colorado SBDC, Pueblo City Council, Southern Colorado Innovation Link, Pueblo Community College, and Colorado State University-Pueblo to insert Pueblo innovators and resources for the participants. Please review the video below for the testimonials from the first cohort:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rriidF_Ld5LQ.

We believe lasting economic benefits will also come from the mentoring that entrepreneurs involved in our programs were offered and continue to be provided through community and CSU Extension partnership. The Pueblo Food Project Participants have been able to engage and meet regularly with mentors from Naturally Boulder and the Southern Colorado SBDC. Each pair is working closely to help develop food products and food service businesses, while connecting members of Southern and Northern Colorado communities. Due to our partnership with the Pueblo Food Project, Colorado State University created a broader sponsorship of Naturally Boulder to allow participants access to mentor resources, Naturally Boulder events, and networks. The participants in the Pueblo Food Project are also being connected to local developments assisting in food product and service development in Pueblo County.

Many of the lasting economic benefits of our efforts will be felt in disadvantaged populations. For example, with our Pueblo Pivot Jumpstart and our Pueblo Food Project Programs we have been successful in recruiting and supporting individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, 27% of those who signed up for the Pueblo Pivot Jumpstart Program indicated that they identified with the BIPOC population. For the Pueblo Food Project Program, 58% of participants identified themselves as a person with a disability. We are starting to see longer-term impacts from some of our programs. For example, one of our Pueblo Food Project partners has been encouraged to apply for a planning grant from Opportunity Now for up to \$50,000 that would help them continue to build capacity by creating a professional development and apprenticeship program for those in Pueblo who want to pursue culinary careers through their food hall.

Our partnership was a key aspect in preparing them to be competitive for this grant. CSU is further working with them to explore how we can support their curriculum and intentions to connect with CSU to provide for-credit opportunities. If successful, an additional program in urban ag production in a nearby site would also be pursued. Grant team members helped to launch the Colorado Collision Food Pitch Competition hosted at CSU Spur. Business owners from across the state - including Sterling, Durango, Grand Junction, Pueblo, Hayden and the Front Range - participated in the competition. Each team competed for additional funding and the chance to further elevate their food ventures through partnerships of eight business resource centers and over 10 additional sponsors.

There will be lasting economic benefits of these programs. A graduate of the Pueblo Food Project Entrepreneurship Development Program illustrates this in their quote about the lasting relationships that have been built through this program: "As I'm growing my business and I have questions, I now know who to ask. It's the best feeling in the world to have someone who believes in you and supports you and is in your corner to help." Our team has been able to offer entrepreneurs market research reports as well as pitch and business mentorship, which has allowed Amber to compete and place in multiple pitch competitions. Please see the following Source Story for more details: <https://source.colostate.edu/csu-pueblo-food-project-partnership/>