



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
ENGAGEMENT AND EXTENSION



Team Spotlight



Dr. Alexis R. Kennedy

[Dr. Alexis R. Kennedy](#)

Assistant Professor

Master of Public Policy and Administration Program

Alexis R. Kennedy is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Administration in the Political Science Department. Dr. Kennedy's research focuses on public management topics including public finance and budgeting, data and artificial intelligence in supporting public service, rural resilience, and social equity. Her articles have appeared in *Public Performance and Management Review*, *Public Administration*, *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, among others. In addition to her academic work, Dr. Kennedy has worked as a practitioner in the energy industry in New Jersey and as a public finance consultant for nonprofit and public entities in Colorado. Outside of CSU, Dr. Kennedy serves on the United Way of Larimer County Board of Directors, the Poudre School District Advisory Committee, and the NoCo Works External Barriers subcommittee where she supports decreasing barriers to housing, childcare, and transportation in Northern Colorado.

Nafisa Nawar Aava

[Nafisa Nawar Aava](#)

Ph.D. Student, Department of Political Science

Nafisa Nawar Aava is a CSU Extension Intern and PhD student in the Department of Political Science within the College of Liberal Arts at Colorado State University. Her research focuses on governance, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable development, with particular interests in circular economy approaches and regional economic development. Through her internship, she is supporting a greenhouse redevelopment feasibility study in Chaffee County by exploring pathways to transform a former cannabis production facility into a sustainable asset for agriculture and regional growth.



Mark Your Calendar

DOWNTOWN COLORADO inc.

As we continue our partnership and collaboration with Downtown Colorado, we want to highlight several opportunities to participate in their programs including:

[DDA CONNECT LUNCH: EXPLORING FORT COLLINS](#)

- Location: Downtown Fort Collins
- Event Type: In-person Event
- July 22, 2026 - July 22, 2026, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- [Learn more and register](#)

[STRONGER TOGETHER SERIES: DISTRICT ALLIANCES SCALING IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION](#)

- Event type: Webinar
- August 4, 2026, 12:00 p.m.
- [Learn more and register](#)

[DREAM IT. FUND IT. BUILD IT. OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGIES FOR TINY TOWNS + DOWNTOWNS](#)

- Event Type: In-person Event

- August 12, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
- [Register online](#)

[URBAN RENEWAL 101 – FORT LUPTON](#)

- Event Type: In-person Event
- August 20, 2026, 5:00 p.m.
- [Learn more and register online](#)

[REVIVE + THRIVE | COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR SAFER, STRONGER BUSINESS DISTRICTS](#)

- Event Type: In-person Event
- August 27, 2026, 8:00 a.m.
- [Learn more and register online](#)

Community and Economic Development Program and Research Unit (PRU)

Save the Date for CED's next meeting

September 9, 2026, at 9:30 a.m. [online at this link](#)
Meeting ID: 789 053 1082
Passcode: 2020

Upcoming 2026 meetings will be held December 2, 9 a.m.

All are welcome but please join our team by adding your name to this spreadsheet to make sure you receive invitations and updates!

To get on our mailing list, please add your name here: [PRU Membership List Community and Economic Development.](#)

Office of Engagement & Extension (OEE) Annual Forum

October 5–8, 2026 | Colorado State University

Mark your calendars for OEE Annual Forum Week 2026, a statewide gathering of Colorado State University Extension faculty, staff, and campus partners. Forum Week provides opportunities to share innovative programs, strengthen collaborations across the CSU engagement network, participate in professional development, and celebrate the impact of Extension and community-engaged scholarship throughout Colorado.

More information, including the agenda and registration details, will be shared by the Office of Engagement & Extension as the event approaches.



Economic Development Council of Colorado's (EDCC) 2026 DRIVE | LEAD | SUCCEED ANNUAL CONFERENCE

September 27-30, 2026
Chamonix Hotel, Cripple Creek

CSU is an institutional member and sponsor for [EDDC's Annual Drive | Lead | Succeed Conference](#), which is geared towards nurturing the growth of Colorado's economy by offering essential resources that:

- Unite leading industry influencers and thought leaders to exchange valuable insights and tackle distinctive challenges.
- Introduce innovative tools and solutions to address pressing economic issues within Colorado's professional economic development community.
- Cultivate meaningful collaboration and facilitate the exchange of fresh ideas among Colorado's Economic Development professionals, business and non-profit leaders, government officials, and beyond.

New this year

EDCC is joining forces with the Rocky Mountain Workforce Development Association (RMWDA) to provide a platform for essential knowledge sharing and networking to support Colorado's vibrant and growing economy. Take advantage of this one-of-kind opportunity to learn from Colorado's Workforce Development ecosystem! We think our stronger partnership with EDCC is timely, given this new focus on the workforce.

Interested in attending? [Reach out to the REDI](#) or the Community and Economic Development PRU team.

If you can't attend a conference, [watch for virtual events from EDCC in Winter 2026.](#)

Regional Networking Roundtable

This inaugural event, hosted by EDCC and its Regional Board Directors, will bring together EDCC members and leaders from economic and workforce development, education, and research institutions to:

- Learn firsthand information about current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities from key stakeholders.
- Discover what your regional peers are working on, identify potential synergies, and build valuable connections.

Understand the critical resources needed to support your efforts and advance your region's economic growth.

[Click here for more details](#)

Next Upcoming

Northwest Region (Counties located in DOLA Regions 11, 12)

- In coordination with – AGNC's Economic Development Summit
- [Register for this event](#)
- August 19, 2026 | Grand River Hospital, Rifle CO

[Virtual & Thought Leadership Paper Series](#)

- November 18, 2026
- ABOUT THE SERIES:
 - EDCC is committed to leading the effort of engaging our vast community of economic development stakeholders including local, regional, and state leaders. By harnessing the knowledge and expertise of our contingency along with extensive research, EDCC's goal is to help educate, inform, and advocate for near and long-term applications to help spur economic resiliency. This work will result in a timely Thought Leadership Community Conversation Starter One-Pager that can guide professionals through conversations and actions at the local level.
- [Click here for more details.](#)

Funding, Program and Educational Opportunities

CSU Extension Internship Programs

The 2026 [CSU Extension summer internship program](#) is now underway, providing CSU students with hands-on opportunities to work alongside Extension specialists and faculty mentors on applied research projects that address challenges facing communities across Colorado.

Community & Economic Development

- A Multidisciplinary Approach to Park County Carcass Disposal Solutions and Feasibility
- Redevelopment Feasibility Study, Chaffee County
- CSU Extension History and Resource Creation
- CSU SPUR UAV Summer Program Instructor Internship
- Determining Routt County Residents' Value of Open Spaces, Views, and Environment
- The Economic Contributions of the Sedgewick Drag Strip
- Understanding Digital Communication Use, Its Opportunities and Challenges

- Working Watersheds Internship

Food Systems

- AI-Powered Agritourism Chatbot: Collecting and Analyzing Data to Empower Agricultural Stakeholders
- Examining Policy and Program Options for Increasing Larimer County's Local Food Sales
- Larimer County Farmers' Market: Supporting Food Access and Local Agriculture
- Local Food Consumer Insights and Soil Health Outreach Internship: Assessing the Impact of Soil Health Education on Consumer Buying Behavior

Stay tuned! Several of these internship projects are being developed into future FREDI Reports, where we'll share key findings and practical insights to support Colorado communities.

Rural Jump-Start Program

The [Rural Jump-Start Program](#) is a collaborative effort by the state, local governments, Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), and economic development organizations (EDO) to incentivize new businesses to start in or move to rural, economically distressed counties in Colorado, which are referred to as Rural Jump-Start zones, and hire new employees.

Rural Jump-Start began in 2016 as a tax incentive program for businesses located in a Rural Jump-Start zone, and in 2021 a grant program was created. Tax benefits include relief from:

- State income tax for the new business.
- State sales and use tax for the new business.
- County personal property tax for the new business.
- Municipal personal property tax for the new business (in participating municipalities); and
- State income tax for qualified new hires

Grant benefits are dependent on the business's location:

- **If a business is located in a Rural-Jump Start zone**, businesses can receive a matching grant of up to \$15,000 as a newly established business.
- **If a business is located in a Rural-Jump Start zone that is also a [Tier 1 Just Transition community](#)**, businesses can receive a matching grant of up to \$25,000 as a newly established business.

The Rural Jump-Start Program will accept applications for the tax benefits through December 31, 2030, and for the grant benefits through June 30, 2028.

If you are a business interested in participating in this program, [review all program qualifications, discussed in greater detail under the Business Eligibility section](#).



The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) connects the research and educational outreach capacity of the West's 32 land-grant institutions with the needs of rural communities, local leaders, entrepreneurs, and agricultural producers to address the region's most pressing development challenges. Established under the Rural Development Act of 1972, the WRDC leads multi-state initiatives that foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and workforce development. Serving as a vital hub, the Center translates research into practical strategies, offers technical assistance, and strengthens the capacity of research and Extension professionals, all while ensuring alignment with federal priorities. Through strategic partnerships and a focus on innovation, the WRDC advances rural prosperity, resilience, and long-term sustainability across the Western United States.

WRDC currently offers four funding opportunities for faculty, staff, and graduate students at western land-grant institutions:

Multistate Projects

- Address a Western critical issue
- Active involvement of at least 2 [Western land-grant institutions](#)
- Must include research and extension activities
- Budget allocation to either component (research or Extension) cannot exceed 66%

Fellow Projects

- Only Western faculty from [land-grant institutions](#) are eligible
- Address a Western Region critical issue

Graduate Assistance

- Address a Western critical issue
- Advisor and student apply together
- Ph.D. students must have passed their qualifying or preliminary exams to apply

Leadership Skill Development

- Faculty/Staff from Land Grant Institutions in the Western Region are eligible
- Funding decisions will be announced quarterly.

For additional details, eligibility requirements, application deadlines, and proposal guidelines, learn more about these opportunities and [download the Request for Applications \(RFA\)](#).

Community Facilities Loan & Grant Program

The USDA Community Facilities program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community in a primarily rural area, and does not include private, commercial, or business undertakings.

This infrastructure funding will expand access to health care, education, and public safety while spurring community development and building sound infrastructure for people living in rural communities.

More than 100 types of projects are eligible for Community Facilities funding. Eligible applicants include municipalities, public bodies, nonprofit organizations, and federally recognized Native American tribes. Projects must be in rural areas with a population of 20,000 or less.

[More information on this program in Colorado.](#)



Reports

In addition to these reports, we continue to update our [webpage](#) to share reports and updates from our work with community partners. Visit our new website highlights for [Community Based Projects](#).

June 2026 Report

[Multidimensional Measures of Community Well-Being: Climate Resilience as a Case Study](#)

[Caroline Conley Norris](#) and [Anders Van Sandt](#)

Key Findings

- Community development is moving beyond growth-based indicators toward multidimensional measures of well-being, but the proliferation of indices raises new questions about which outcomes align with community values.
- Applied to climate resilience, this framing reveals that prosperity and climate resilience indicators are only weakly related — and vary across space.
- Different regions face fundamentally different development sequencing problems.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

May 2026 Report

[Economic Impacts of Irrigated Acreage Loss in Colorado's Lower Arkansas River Valley](#)

[Yvette Uwineza](#), [Rebecca Hill](#), [Jordan Suter](#)

Key Findings

- The lower Arkansas River Valley has experienced long-term declines in irrigated acreage as agricultural water has been transferred to other uses.
- Irrigated land represents a small share of total acreage in the region, but it supports higher value crop production and local economic activity.
- Using an input-output model, we estimate that losing approximately 3,043 irrigated acres per year reduces regional economic activity by about \$4.4 million to \$4.9 million annually.
- Each acre removed from irrigation is associated with roughly \$1,400 to \$1,600 in annual economic losses, depending on which crops are affected.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

April 2026 Report

[Floyd Hill Construction and Retail Activity in Clear Creek County](#)

[Ray Miller](#), [Tim Komarek](#)

Key Findings

- Construction for the I-70 Floyd Hill Project began in July 2023
- Clear Creek County retail sales are estimated to be roughly \$24 million lower per year in FY2024-FY2025 than they would have been absent construction-related disruption.
- The number of operating retailers also appears lower than expected o The effect is geographically uneven: Idaho Springs shows a measurable sales shortfall, while nearby Georgetown closely tracks its synthetic comparison.
- The findings point to targeted mitigation during large infrastructure projects, especially for communities located directly along the construction corridor

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

March 2026 Report

[Population Aging and Economic Growth in Colorado: Why Regional Connectivity Matters for Rural Communities](#)

[Ray Miller](#), [Tim Komarek](#) , [Yuulin An](#)

Key Findings

- Colorado counties are aging rapidly, with the share of residents age 60 and older rising across nearly every region of the state.
- National evidence shows that population aging can reduce local economic growth, but the effects vary significantly across space.
- In rural counties, a 10% increase in the 60+ population share is associated with a roughly 5–6% decline in GDP per capita over a decade, while the effect

- is much smaller or statistically insignificant in metropolitan counties.
- Counties that are economically connected to nearby labor markets through commuting flows are better able to offset aging-related economic pressures.
- For Colorado, this suggests that regional integration—transportation links, commuting networks, and cross-county labor markets—may be a key tool for helping rural communities adapt to demographic change.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

February 2026 Report

[Risks and Opportunities for Western Agricultural Producers in Direct to Consumer Beef Markets](#)

[Kelsey Story](#), [Stephen Koontz](#), [Dawn Thilmany](#)

Key Findings

- Direct marketing by Colorado beef producers is a growing opportunity that leverages interest in local foods and demand for more food market options.
- There are several strategies producers can adopt to direct market beef, all with different market strategies and new risks to consider.
- Communities will likely benefit from more direct marketed beef if it allows more of the food dollar to stay with farms (and processors) in their region, but policy leaders should consider how to help mitigate risks producer face in these markets.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

Colorado Futures Center Reports



The Colorado Futures Center is an independent, nonpartisan and academically grounded 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to informing about economic, fiscal, and public policy issues impacting community economic health and quality of life in Colorado and beyond.

Our Partners at the Colorado Futures Center regularly release their Statewide Economic Forecast, [ColoradoCast](#), and recently released the ColoradoCast for the [second quarter, 2026](#).

This release of the ColoradoCast, timed to allow for shutdown related data delays to resolve, is the first published update to contain economic data from the first month of the Iran War. Consistent with the general post-March 2026 consensus, the outlook for the Colorado economy, while remaining positive, is now showing slight signs of weakening. The ColoradoCast model uses contemporary data to predict

economic performance for the succeeding six months. Thus, the incorporation of data from March 2026 allows for the first assessment of the impact of the war. This ColoradoCast predicts a slowdown in state economic growth continuing and accelerating into September 2026. This September 2026 slowdown in growth is consistent with the slight weakening in the major model drivers during the March 2026, the first month of the Iran War. While the overall economy is forecast to continue to grow, the rate of growth is expected to slow. The ColoradoCast forecasts that the annual rate of growth will moderate by a full percentage point at the end of the outlook period

Stay Connected

Find us on social media, get community and economic development related questions answered via email, forward to a friend, or submit your contributions to our newsletter!

Visit the [Regional Economic Development Institute website](#) and sign up for updates (see the bottom left sign-up prompt).

NEWSLETTER TEAM CONTRIBUTORS

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