



COLORADO

Final CREC Policy Academy Report

JANUARY 26, 2024





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving Economic Competitiveness in Colorado Through Enhanced Communication, Collaboration, and Alignment

Colorado has a distinct opportunity to boost its economic competitiveness through better communication, collaboration, and alignment of economic development strategies. The goal is to reduce redundancies and build capacity among communities across the state. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in communication and inefficiencies when mobilizing programs, policies, and funding to different parts of the state. Communities without organized economic development programs missed out on unique opportunities, while those with robust programs thrived.

To address these challenges, economic development peers across the state have discussed the need for alignment between state, regional, and local programs. This alignment can help create programs and policies that "rise the tide that lifts all boats" and offer Colorado's greatest opportunity.

Colorado is one of six states chosen to participate in a pilot program conducted by the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness' (CREC) Policy Academy. This program, funded by the Economic Development Administration, provides technical assistance to states, regional economic development organizations, and other stakeholders to collaborate and promote better alignment in state and regional strategies for more impactful, coordinated, and collaborative implementation of economic development programs.

A coalition of economic development stakeholders from across Colorado has been meeting for the past 10 months to develop a vision to establish and promote a framework between EDDs, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and other key workforce and economic development stakeholders. The goal is to guide enhanced communication, collaboration, and alignment of economic development strategies, reduce redundancies, and build capacity for increased economic competitiveness across the state.

The diversity of communities across Colorado sets the state apart. As the Academy's time comes to a close, the coalition continues working towards a comprehensive framework that incorporates state and regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) to educate state and local leaders on the policies and programs necessary to achieve economic vitality across Colorado.

BACKGROUND COLORADO

With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Colorado Governor's Office initiated conversations around the need for the state to rethink both short- and long-term goals and priorities. The crux of these discussions focused on building more sustainable economies by evolving all levels of governance in the state.

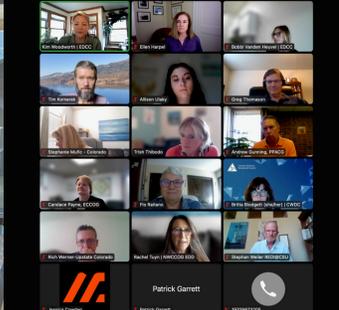
For many communities, the process of thinking and working across political boundaries and agencies was foreign, drawing out old grievances, fears, and uncertainties.

Upon receipt of an EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance award, the Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade (OEDIT), along with the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), and the nonprofit community development organization Community Builders, implemented an 18-month three-part program to catalyze locally developed strategies to build capacity for economic development based on local business conditions and needs. A total of 16 regions, comprising over 160 communities took part in this bottom-up approach towards creating community partnerships tasked with identifying shared goals that the regional community team could work on to build more resilient economies that transcend municipal and county borders.

The work that has preceded Colorado's participation in the CREC Policy Academy has nudged the State of Colorado, and its departments that support state programs, to a decisive moment where conversations, proposals, and strategies live or die.

Colorado's Policy Academy Team presents the following Alignment Strategy report as a guiding document in support of establishing guidelines for mindful alignment of state goals, priorities, and policies with the understanding that our local communities have differing levels of capacity and local economic development will have greater impact when government officials advocate for tactics that are sympathetic to local needs and challenges.





The Core and Home Teams were selected based on demographics, industry partners, statewide reach and governance. Our goal was to have the perspective from across the state and various stakeholders to build a universal framework that would align our state's effort in supporting economic development programs. Our Home Team continues to grow adding additional talent and support for this initiative.

CORE TEAM

- **Co-Lead, Kim Woodworth**, Executive Director, Economic Development Council of Colorado
- **Co-Lead, Laura Lewis Marchino**, Executive Director, Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado & Chair, Colorado Association of Regional Organizations
- **Former Co-Lead, Trish Thibodo**, formerly Community Development Director, Region 10 League for Economic Assistance & Planning
- **Candace Payne**, Executive Director, East Central Council of Governments
- **Greg Thomason**, Sr. Program Manager and Eastern Colorado Rural Opportunity Representative, Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)

HOME TEAM

- **Britta Blodgett**, Assistant Director of Communications & Collaboration, Colorado Workforce Development Council
- **Amanda Corum**, Executive Director at Pueblo Corporate College (*a division of Pueblo Community College*)
- **Jessica Cowden**, Director of Marketing & Communications, Manufacturer's Edge
- **Tinker Duclo**, Vice President & Campus Dean, Colorado Mountain College, Rifle
- **Ashley Edinger**, Senior Director, Strategic Supports, Rocky Mountain Partnership
- **Dr. Curt Freed**, President, Morgan Community College, *a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)*
- **Patrick Garrett**, Rural Manager, Rural Economic Development Initiative, Colorado Dpt. of Local Affairs
- **Stephanie Gonzales**, Executive Director, Southeastern Colorado Enterprise Development
- **Andy Gunning**, Executive Director, Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (*currently working on their regional CEDS*)
- **Leslie Mastroianni**, Executive Director, Southern Colorado Economic Development District
- **Stephanie Mufic**, Business Innovation & Strategy Unit Manager, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment
- **Glenn Plagens**, CEO, Manufacturer's Edge
- **Flo Raitano**, Director of Partnership Development and Innovation, Denver Regional Coalition of Governments, and Vice Chair, Colorado Association of Regional Organizations
- **Sarah Stoeber**, Executive Director, San Luis Valley Development Resources Group
- **Rachel Tuyn**, Director, Northwest Colorado Coalition of Governments, Economic Development District
- **Stephan Weiler**, Co-Director, Colorado State University's Regional Economic Development Institute
- **Rich Werner**, CEO, Upstate Colorado Economic Development, Northern Colorado (*currently working on their regional CEDS*)



TEAM COLORADO



COLORADO
Office of Economic Development
& International Trade



Colorado Association of
Regional Organizations



COLORADO
Department of
Labor and Employment



COLORADO
Department of Local Affairs



Colorado Workforce
Development Council



REGIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



**MANUFACTURER'S
EDGE**



DENVER REGIONAL
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



Pikes Peak Area
Council of Governments
Communities Working Together



SAN LUIS VALLEY
DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES GROUP
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS





COLORADO VISION STATEMENT

Establish and promote a framework between Economic Development Districts (EDD's), governmental and non-governmental agencies, and other key workforce and economic development stakeholders to guide enhanced communication, collaboration, and alignment of economic development strategies and actions within Colorado.



COLORADO VICTORY STATEMENT

The regional CEDS informs the state CEDS to better align strategies and program development. A shared framework would exist across the state and regions with ongoing two-way communication and awareness across both workforce and economic development players. This framework would serve as a critical touchpoint for legislation affecting local economic development and create a model for other states to emulate.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Received a letter from Colorado Governor Jarod Polis in support of the CREC application that qualified Colorado as one of the six participating states in CREC's Policy Academy.
- Recruited key members from Colorado's economic and workforce development, higher education, and community leaders to serve on Colorado's Core and Home Teams in support of the Policy Academy process.
- Created concise, meaningful Vision and Goal statements for Colorado's Alignment Strategy that have facilitated our ability to communicate the importance of this initiative.
- Have selected CO | Align as Colorado's Alignment Strategy brand, providing us with the ability to create meaningful messaging moving forward.
- Have gained endorsements from key department leaders willing to build awareness and support for this initiative within the Governor's Cabinet.
- Established three sub-committees, who are engaged with questions related to developing programs to build partnerships, strong communications and attract new resources in support of Colorado's alignment strategy.
- Working with Visible Network Labs. Their Community Partner Relationship Management (CPRM) platform will allow the CO | Align to better understand the interconnectedness amongst Colorado's economic development network by designing and implementing a measurement framework that collects and analyzes social network data to reduce redundancies and expedite meaningful connections.
- Have the buy-in from both Core and Home Teams in continuing to promote the alignment strategy, working to achieve our phase two adoption goals.





ACTION PLAN

01

Develop an internal and external communication strategy including network mapping to leverage existing relationships.

02

Develop an MOU between economic development stakeholders to identify and leverage strengths, create efficiencies, and increase collaboration.

03

Identify resources needed to amplify and sustain these efforts for now and well into the future.

04

Identify next steps after the Policy Academy:

- Celebrate the work that has been done so far by announcing phase 2 of this initiative.
- Enhance the new brand CO |Align.
- Secure Visible Network Labs to identify all the players in the ecosystem.
- Build consensus among top state cabinet leadership.
- Secure funding for one FTE to help drive the objectives and activities of the strategy.
- Core/Home Teams establish meeting cadence to carry out the objectives and activities set forth by the Home Team.

WORKING COMMITTEES



Communications Committee



- Establish communications to help educate stakeholders on the value and importance of the initiative.
- Help build momentum, trust, and participation among stakeholders around the initiative.



Memorandum Committee



- Identify all stakeholders in the ecosystem and develop their role within the initiative.
- Build consensus among stakeholders to create a cultural shift in how Colorado performs Economic Development activities.
- Identify and secure state-level leadership that will support long-term sustainability of the initiative beyond leadership turnover.



Resource Committee



- Through the work of the Communications and MOU subcommittees, work to identify what resources will be needed to sustain the initiative.

RELEVANCY

The creation of a framework among stakeholders will help to establish the coordination for mindful alignment of state goals, priorities, and policies, with the understanding that our local communities have differing levels of capacity and local economic development, will have greater impact when government officials advocate for tactics that are sympathetic to local needs and challenges.

TIMELINE | OUTCOMES | DELIVERABLES



DC in-person meeting: Core Team established a vision and mission to bring back to the Home Team.



Working through a contractual agreement to begin work with Visible Network Labs to help us identify the Economic Development ecosystem in CO.



Gathered the Home Team for a one-day strategic planning session with our facilitators in July. During this session we worked to refine the vision and victory statement; developed three working sub-committees and established a meeting cadence.



Final report completed in coordination with Core and Home Teams, to close out phase 1 of the initiative. Established a monthly meeting cadence for phase 2.



The sub-committees met bi-weekly and reported to the Home Team on the subsequent Fridays.



Present to CREC community. Invite all key stakeholders and state leadership to the presentation to kick off discussions at the state cabinets to begin to onboard the initiative.



Facilitators joined and presented with the Core and Home Teams for CO's Annual Economic Development Conference. An official announcement & joint press release "[Powering Progress: A New Era of Economic Development](#)," began marketing efforts for the initiative.



Secure contract with Visible Network Labs and begin project to identify Colorado's #EconDev ecosystem.



Core and Home Teams participated in a re-branding exercise to develop a new name and logo for the initiative.



Establish an MOU among key state #EconDev leadership; celebrate one-year anniversary of accomplishments.

OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES

Factors limiting success:

- Initially, the outcomes and objectives for the group were a bit fuzzy. While this does allow for expansiveness and creativity, presenting clear objectives and next steps earlier in the process would have made our time together more efficient and effective. As we are an early pilot program, this is perhaps necessary and inevitable, as elements of the process are further refined.
- “Limited” is the term that best describes the roadblocks that were encountered during our 10 month alignment strategy engagement. While the Core Team coalesced quickly and demonstrated an ability to work together collaboratively during our first retreat in Arlington, Virginia—bringing home a concise mission statement and outline of the goals for the coming months—we struggled to translate this sense of purpose and opportunity to the Home Team members. The first several meetings with the Home Team were spent bringing them up to speed in an attempt to solicit input from them. It wasn’t until the last two, or maybe three meetings with the Home Team that ideas flowed and there was a real sense of engagement in formulating the content that will go to make up this alignment strategy.
- The name selected for this process was unfortunate as it did not convey what was likely the intent. This was definitely not an “Academy” where one would expect to learn techniques and strategies from subject matter experts.
- There did not seem to be a clear objective or well-defined outcome for this program from the outset, so my overall impression was that the Core Team was struggling to communicate both the benefits of the Academy and what expected outcomes we should be focusing on. It just felt disorganized.

Steps taken to mitigate challenges:

- As the months progressed, outcomes and roles became more clearly defined, but again, if this had happened earlier, our productivity might have been higher.
- We did not implement any directed actions to overcome our challenges other than to discuss our progress, or lack of, during our Core Team meetings. Kim Woodworth and Bobbi Blank were excellent in their ability to develop comprehensive meeting outlines that reflected what had been stated in past meetings, while giving precise guidance on the points that still needed to be unwrapped and discussed.
- Meeting notes were provided to catch people up and the group moved forward with those who actively were interested in participating. I believe there is recognition that we will unlikely be able to have every needed voice at the table but if we continue to provide meeting communication to whomever requests, we have done our job.
- It wasn’t until committees commenced that actionable activities began to formulate helping bring a more clear picture of what we were trying to achieve.

LEASONS LEARNED

- Before bringing stakeholders together, the initiative needed a clearer vision.
- Capitalize on existing structures and relationships at the outset and build from there.
- Virtual meetings create a ready, or convenient roadblock to groups coming together to work on a common problem. It is easier for participants to get distracted, or just sit on the sideline and not participate when virtual meetings become the only avenue for engagement. Fortunately, the Core Team had the opportunity through our meetings in Virginia and Ohio, to build relations and a shared sense of purpose.
- There's a perception that Colorado is already collaborative. If that was the end goal, this exercise is redundant. Many of the items listed under EDD alignment existed well-before this Academy effort and OEDIT were already well into helping coordinate the development of a statewide CEDS that would incorporate the common themes from the 14 regional CEDS across the state.
- Each partnership and community is unique.
- Caution that the various regions across Colorado are highly individualized and distinct. While Colorado is tremendously collaborative, our success is predicated on the fact that we recognize and respect the distinct nature of our individual efforts and see that those individual efforts all lead to success of the state as a whole, while taking sometimes astonishingly different pathways.
- We struggled to identify the proper entity to serve as the advocate for Colorado's alignment strategy. The result of these discussions has resulted in developing a quasi-public/private consortium whereby the Governor's Cabinet will give a formal acknowledgement to the importance of aligning policies and programs with local community goals, while the day-to-day operations are fulfilled through a yet to be decided agency or non-profit.

SUSTAINABILITY

Enhancing Collaboration and Economic Growth through Effective Communication

This initiative has become a catalyst for fostering collaboration and effective communication within our economic development community, which will undoubtedly continue to expand over time. It has provided valuable information, knowledge, and understanding among stakeholders that was not available before. This has created an opportunity to learn from each other and build resilient economies that transcend borders. By leveraging this network, we can foster broader collaboration and enhance economic development initiatives across the state. As the network expands, so will the resources available to support economic growth.

SUSTAINABILITY CONTINUED

This initiative also presents a unique opportunity to bring together parallel tracks of economic development initiatives, enabling us to gain a better understanding of the economic landscape and identify opportunities for growth. By maintaining strong communication channels, we can capitalize on these opportunities and ensure that resources are directed towards the areas that need them the most.

In conclusion, we are thrilled with the progress we have made so far. However, we recognize that there is still room for improvement. By continuing to align our efforts and maintain strong communication channels, we can build a visible network that will revolutionize economic development for the State of Colorado.



NEXT STEPS

- Establish a meeting cadence for the CORE and HOME Teams to initiate phase 2 of the CO|Align initiative.
- Create messaging that resonates with the economic development ecosystem that initiates broad involvement in the CO|Align initiative.
- Create nomenclature for the various groups who contribute to the overall ecosystem to clarify their roles and responsibilities. This will then help identify where they each fit into the economic development process, programs, and policies.
- Establish an inclusive MOU for economic development stakeholders to easily participate in the CO|Align initiative.
- Use CEDS as alignment tool to guide messaging and MOU language.
- Secure contract with Visible Network Labs and begin mapping the ecosystem.
- Foster geographic coverage throughout the state, recognizing both the commonalities and differences within and between urban, suburban, rural and tribal regions in Colorado.
- Identify funding sources to secure one FTE that will champion this initiative and create a long-term sustainability strategy.
- Celebrate and enjoy our progress as we move forward with the initiative and to be sure we share the progress to the larger stakeholder audience.