



BUILDING RESILIENT ECONOMIES IN COAL COMMUNITIES (BRECC)

COAL COMMUNITIES ACTION CHALLENGE

INTRODUCTION

Coal communities across the country are reimagining local industries and developing transformative initiatives to build stronger, more resilient economies. The Coal Communities Action Challenge is part of the greater [BRECC initiative](#) to support coal communities and enact locally driven development strategies. The Coal Communities Action Challenge **invites coal communities to form cross-sector teams and apply for capacity-building support**. The Action Challenge is a technical assistance program that will empower community partners to identify and advance projects for economic revitalization and diversification.

Through the Action Challenge, community teams will **receive 12-months of individualized expert consultation that will ultimately result in the development of a community-specific economic diversification plan**. Up to 15 community teams will be competitively selected to participate. Teams will be provided one-on-one coaching support, attend a virtual learning series with subject matter experts, network with other selected coal community teams and participate in an in-person capstone event.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

Open Call for Applications: Monday, November 14, 2022

Application Information Session: Tuesday, November 29, 2022, 2:00 p.m. EST

Application Deadline: Friday, January 13, 2023, 11:59 p.m. EST

Announcement of Selected Teams: February 14, 2023

Kick-Off Webinar with Selected Teams: February 2023

Duration of the Action Challenge Program: One year

PROGRAM INFORMATION

What is the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities Initiative (BRECC)?

Through the support of the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration ([EDA](#)) and the American Rescue Plan funding, the BRECC initiative will create a knowledge-sharing and peer-learning community of practice to empower local leaders and other champions to develop new ideas, approaches and fundable projects as coal communities seek to retool local and regional economies. As the lead implementing organization, the National Association of Counties (NACo) has partnered with the West Virginia Community Development Hub, Community Builders and EntreWorks Consulting to develop educational programming and to provide community coaching support. More information on BRECC can be found at www.naco.org.



BRECC Program Partners:



Who should apply?

Applicants should be cross-sector teams from coal communities that are dedicated to building stronger, more resilient and reimagined local economies. The Action Challenge aims to support counties or communities that have limited technical capacity resources and are in the early stages of economic diversification planning. **Note:** *Counties or communities must form a cross-sector team to apply; multi-jurisdictional and regional teams are permitted.*

How is a coal community defined?

According to the U.S. Economic Development Administration, coal communities are communities and regions that can reasonably demonstrate how changes in the coal economy have resulted or are anticipated to result in job losses and layoffs in any coal-reliant commercial sector. This includes, but is not limited to coal mining, coal-fired power plants, as well as related transportation, logistics, and/or supply chain manufacturing industries. More information on EDA's priorities in coal communities can be found [here](#).

What will Action Challenge teams do?

Selected Teams will participate in and receive:

- A quarterly virtual learning series with all selected teams from across the country, which feature subject matter experts on the strategies and principles of economic diversification, including topics such as access to housing and education, workforce retraining, rural industries, multi-sector planning and investment funding resources
- One-on-one coaching with an economic development expert from the BRECC program partners over a 12-month period
- Technical planning assistance that results in a community action plan for economic diversification
- Identification of potential economic development projects eligible for federal support
- Peer mentoring activities where teams will be intentionally paired with another community to share ideas and implementation advice, and
- A capstone event held in-person at the end of the 12-month cohort where teams will present action plans and receive feedback and support from peers and Advisory Council Members.



Are there any requirements for the Action Challenge teams?

Yes. Teams should:

- Include at least one county government official
- Have no fewer than three members (*A maximum of two representatives from a given organization may participate on the same team.*)
- Have cross-sector representation (*Teams may include but are not limited to local elected officials, local government staff, representatives from nonprofits, community development organizations, area businesses and Chambers of Commerce, philanthropic organizations, educational institutions, utility or power plant representatives, regional organizations and other critical stakeholders in your community.*)
- Commit to developing an economic diversification plan
- Commit to fully participating in the Action Challenge's virtual learning, coaching, peer mentoring activities and in-person capstone event, and
- Identify a lead organization and provide a point of contact for initial communication and correspondence.

How will applications be evaluated?

Applications will be evaluated and weighted based on:

- Quality and appropriateness of the team members to address local economic diversification plans
- History of past cross-sector partnership experiences. (*These past partnerships do not have to have been with each other. We are interested in team members' experiences with collaboration, not just your history with the named applicant team members.*)
- Clear commitment to and strong potential to benefit from participating in the Action Challenge
- Level of economic vulnerability and hardship faced by the community and the need for technical capacity resources, and
- Consideration of geographic and industry diversity of selected coal communities.

Is there an application fee?

No.

Who will review the applications?

NACo and the BRECC program partners will screen each application to ensure the key eligibility criteria are met, and a panel with issue-area expertise will review applications. Final selections will take into account geographic and industrial-base diversity.

Will selected teams receive funding?

No, selected Action Challenge teams will not receive a direct financial award. The Action Challenge is a technical assistance program.

Will there be travel funds for selected teams to attend the workshops?



Yes, travel costs will be covered for two representatives from each team to attend the Action Challenge's capstone event.

HOW TO PREPARE & SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS:

Completed applications containing all the requested information should be emailed as a Word or PDF attachment to coal@naco.org by Friday, January 13, 2023, 11:59 p.m. EST. Complete applications will answer the following questions.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Community Information.

- a. Community name (e.g., county, municipality, region): This application is being submitted by three partners, including Routt County, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) Northwest Workforce Region, and Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC). All three applicants are members of the Northwest Colorado Development Council (NWCDC) and are submitting this proposal with the unanimous support of the other NWCDC members. NWCDC was formed through an intergovernmental agreement to address the challenges associated with the sunseting of coal in this region, and to promote regional economic diversification.
- b. Name of county/counties in which the community resides, if not the county itself: NWCDC includes three counties (Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt) in the farthest northwest corner of Colorado, as well as seven additional communities (the Cities of Craig, Hayden, Meeker, Oak Creek, Rangely, Steamboat Springs, and Yampa).
- c. State: Colorado

2. Describe your community. Be sure to include the population, demographics, main industries and any relevant challenges, infrastructure or assets.

(Suggested word count: 150)

Northwest Colorado prides itself on stunning natural beauty, strong ranching and agricultural traditions, deep cultural heritage and growing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities. With its mix of rural and frontier counties, it has a combined population of 44,752.¹ It is predominantly White (84%) and Hispanic (11.7%), with a combined poverty rate of 9%.² The top five industries in the region include accommodations and food services; health care; retail trade; construction, and public administration.³ Mining jobs are six times

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, July 2021 estimates.

² Ibid.



more prevalent in the region compared to the rest of Colorado.⁴ Transportation infrastructure, largely linked to the agricultural and coal mining industries, includes two regional airports and Union Pacific rail lines through Routt and Moffat Counties. Interstate 70 lies south of the region, while U.S. Highway 40 provides the main east-west vehicle transportation, connected by a network of state highways and county roads. CNCC has two campuses in Rio Blanco and Moffat Counties, and Colorado Mountain College has a campus in Routt County. A robust regional broadband program has supported the rollout of broadband across the region. A variety of outdoor and cultural resources provide rich tourism and economic development opportunities, including Steamboat Springs Ski Resort, Dinosaur National Monument, the Gates of Lodore Canyon, the wild horse herd of the Sand Wash Basin, ample recreation along the Yampa, Green and White Rivers, and world-class big game hunting. A combination of national forest, state trust land, BLM land and wilderness designations creates exceptional backcountry recreation opportunities.

Despite these tremendous assets, the region faces serious and urgent economic challenges due to the imminent closure of the coal-fired power plants in Craig and Hayden by 2028, and the associated impacts on the four active coal mines in the region. Mining and power generation are substantial drivers of the economy in all three counties.

3. Describe your community’s reliance on or transition from a coal-based economy.
(Suggested word count: 150)

According to a report developed by the Coal Communities Innovation Project from 2019-2022, the direct coal and coal power plant employment in the three-county NWCDC region is 1,183. However, this number does not consider the indirect supply chain jobs that rely on the mines and power plants. According to the report, 2,862 direct and indirect jobs will be lost, along with \$228.4 million in wages and \$621,433,561 in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The economic loss represents nearly 20% of Moffat County’s employment and 47% of the regional GDP. Furthermore, counties, municipalities, and special taxing districts will lose millions in severance taxes, federal mineral leases, and local ad valorem taxes that fund essential services like schools and hospitals. In the town of Hayden, for example, 51% of the tax base currently comes from coal. In the town of Craig, the recent closure of several national chains such as Pizza Hut and Walgreens portends the coming contractions. The large-scale economic impacts of the coal transition extend far beyond the direct job losses, with ripple effects through every facet of the local economies in all three counties. In addition to needing immediate support for transitioning coal and power plant workers, it is imperative for the region to identify new economic opportunities.

4. Describe your community team’s efforts to advance economic diversification, if any.
Please include any relevant projects or accomplishments of individual team members (e.g.,

³ BLS QCEW; Economic & Planning Systems

⁴ Northwest Colorado Industry Location Quotient, BLS QCEW; Economic & Planning Systems



rehabilitation or revitalization projects, economic development planning, COVID-19 recovery efforts, workforce development programs, grant-funded efforts, new construction, tourism initiatives or creative placemaking efforts).
(Suggested word count: 100 - 300)

In the face of this economic and social challenge—exacerbated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic—the region spent the past year developing a Roadmaps Transition Plan, funded by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). The NWCDC was created specifically to address the economic transitions facing the region as a whole, expanding from the previous Yampa Valley Economic Development Council. The strategic plan outlines strategies to diversify and grow the economy as it transitions away from coal and recovers from the pandemic.

The core NWCDC team began meeting in January 2022, with the support of an economic development firm called Upsize Marketing Strategies that was hired through a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) grant. NWCDC held a variety of workgroups, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, regular meetings, and conducted multiple business retention and expansion visits to ultimately identify five priority areas, which include:

- Business Attraction, Retention and Expansion
- Workforce Attraction, Retention and Training
- Housing Choice and Affordability
- Childcare and Workforce Support
- Regional Transportation

The NWCDC identified six target industry clusters upon which to focus economic development efforts, and conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for each. The target industries include:

- Clean energy generation
- Light manufacturing
- Agriculture/value added agriculture
- Outdoor recreation/cultural heritage tourism
- Technology and business services
- Health care

NWCDC has developed ten workgroups made up of stakeholders and subject matter experts that are assigned to more deeply explore and implement specific economic development strategies, such as the Clean Power and Value Added Agriculture workgroups.

In addition to the collaborative work of the NWCDC, all of the counties and towns in the region have identified and begun to implement their own economic diversification projects. For example, CNCC has invested in extensive workforce education and community planning in response to coal transition, including launching the first college-sponsored apprenticeship program.



5. **Describe the local challenge(s) that your team seeks to address through participation in the Action Challenge.**

(Suggested word count: 150)

Our team seeks support through the BRECC Action Challenge to specifically help us implement our Clean Energy Generation industry strategies. We have many opportunities to support and invest in alternative energy generation projects that can supplement the loss of the coal power plants, but recognize that this will require a broad approach and extensive resources. We feel that BRECC's technical assistance, coaching and the opportunity to connect with other coal-impacted communities from across the country will help our communities prioritize and set in motion various clean energy projects.

BRECC Action Challenge support and participation could help our Clean Energy Workgroup to implement some of the action items that we identified in the DOLA Roadmap, which include the following:

- Support the reuse of coal power plants for molten salt battery storage and biomass
- Support the development of solar, wind and geothermal power generation in the region
- Explore potential alternative use of coal mined in the region, such as coal to products
- Explore the potential for other energy generation technologies including nuclear and hydrogen power generation
- Actively seek funding opportunities to support projects
- Identify opportunities to leverage existing infrastructure in partnership with Xcel Energy and Tri-State Energy
- Modify land use plans and regulations as needed to support energy development

We recognize that for long-term transition to renewable energy to occur and be sustainable, we will need to develop and nurture local champions and leaders who can both inform our strategies and carry this work forward through partnerships. The opportunity to connect our regional efforts to other communities experiencing similar challenges at the national level is exciting and promising. We see the BRECC Action Challenge as an excellent opportunity to help us move this critical portion of our DOLA Roadmap forward and to build local capacity and implementation structure. The need for support is urgent, as our region faces the challenge of standing up alternative energy in a very short period of time.

6. **Describe how your team will work together on this joint effort.** If applicable, please describe how members of your team have partnered together previously or worked in partnership with other organizations outside of the named team members.

(Suggested word count: 150)

Routt County will serve as our lead partner, represented by Commissioner Tim Redmond. Caroline McClenahan, the Grants Manager for Routt County, will serve as the primary point



of contact. Dean Sasha Nelson at CNCC and Christina Oxley from the CDLE Northwest Workforce Region will also form our core team. These organizations have a strong history of working together, including on the DOLA Roadmaps project and the NWCDC efforts to date.

The BRECC team will extend far beyond these three core members to include dozens of organizations, community leaders and individuals who have participated in the DOLA Roadmaps process to date. The NWCDC currently has 61 active members. We plan to lean on the participation of a variety of existing partners, including the Routt County Economic Development Partnership, the City of Craig Economic Development, the Hayden Economic Development Commission, the Colorado Office of Just Transition, DOLA, the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC), Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), and Club 20, to name a few. CNCC also has an active partnership with the University of Wyoming to explore an energy summit with the Department of Energy. We also have existing relationships with the utility companies in the region including Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association and Xcel Energy.

7. **Please list any limitations you may have that would prevent your team members from fully participating in the BRECC Action Challenge activities**, including virtual learning sessions, national travel (for up to two team members for capstone event) and engaging with local community.

We do not anticipate any limitations and are excited to participate fully in BRECC Action Challenge activities.

8. **Main Point of Contact.** The Point of Contact is the team member responsible for engaging with BRECC partners initial project calls, coordinating team communications and activities (if selected) and providing any additional information during the application process upon request.

- a. First, Last Name: Caroline McClenahan
- b. Professional Title: Grant Administrator
- c. Organization Name: Routt County
- d. Email Address: cmcclenahan@co.routt.co.us
- e. Phone Number: (970) 870-5345

9. **List of Team Members.** Please provide the below information for each of your team members. Teams should have no fewer than three members and should include at least one county government official. Each team member will be required to sign a letter of commitment prior to the final selection announcement. Strong Action Challenge teams will be made up of cross-sector partners (e.g., local elected officials, local government staff, representatives from nonprofits, community development organizations, area businesses and Chambers of Commerce, philanthropic organizations, educational institutions, utility or



power plant representatives, regional organizations, and other critical community stakeholders.) A maximum of two representatives from a given organization are allowed to participate on a team.

(If you have questions about your team's make up, please contact the BRECC program team at coal@naco.org for guidance.)

Team Member One:

- a. First, Last Name: Tim Redmond
- b. Organization Name: Routt County
- c. Professional Title: County Commissioner, District II
- d. Email Address:
- e. Phone Number:
- f. Sector the member represents (e.g., county, nonprofit, private sector, city, town, workforce, school): County
- g. Brief description of role in the partnership:**

Team Member Two:

- a. First, Last Name: Sasha Nelson
- b. Organization Name: Colorado Northwestern Community College
- c. Professional Title: Dean of Workforce Education & Economic Development
- d. Email Address:
- e. Phone Number:
- f. Sector the member represents (e.g., county, nonprofit, private sector, city, town, workforce, school): Education and workforce development
- g. Brief description of role in the partnership:**

Team Member Three:

- h. First, Last Name: Christina Oxley
- i. Organization Name: Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, Northwest Workforce Region
- j. Professional Title: Business Services Coordinator
- k. Email Address:
- l. Phone Number:**
- m. Sector the member represents (e.g., county, nonprofit, private sector, city, town, workforce, school): Workforce development
- n. Brief description of role in the partnership:**

Additional Team Members:

In addition to the three lead applicants listed on this application, this project will leverage the partnership and collaboration of the entire NWCDC, which includes 10 voting members representing all three counties and seven towns in the region.



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