

Rural Technical Assistance Program: Rural Roadmaps Implementation Projects

Application Questions:

1. Will the Applicant Entity also be the fiscal agent for the grant? If not, the fiscal agent's information will be required. (Taxpayer ID# and Sam.gov UEI #)
Yes – Routt County
2. Project Name
Northwest Colorado Development Council (NWCDC) Regional Economic Development Website
3. Expected project completion date
6-12 months
4. Project Description. Please also highlight how this project will support economic recovery, opportunity, accessibility and equity within the region.

The NWCDC and its 10 member communities located in Routt, Moffat, and Rio Blanco Counties voted unanimously to develop an economic development website to grow and diversify the regional economy in our three-county region to replace the financial loss from the coal transition. The website is an essential marketing tool to manage regional tourism, generate business development leads, recruit new companies to rural Northwest Colorado, and provide information about incentives and resources for existing businesses and workforce training opportunities for dislocated energy workers.

The NWCDC DOLA Roadmaps Strategic Plan identified the economic development website as a critical marketing strategy for new industry clusters, including clean energy, light manufacturing, value-added agriculture/food processing, OREC/cultural heritage tourism, health care, technology and business services, and small business and entrepreneurship.

To support existing businesses or start-ups, the website provides information about state, regional, and local resources, incentives, and workforce training programs at local community colleges. For further assistance, the website will direct interested companies and entrepreneurs to local economic development organizations (EDOs) and/or the NWCDC project manager who can provide technical assistance. Existing businesses and entrepreneurs can be connected to a Small Business Development Center—such as the Yampa Valley Entrepreneurship Center, OEDIT incentives and state grants, and other financing opportunities, contributing to economic diversification and job creation.

The regional website also supports the strategy to grow the OREC/Cultural Heritage Tourism Sector of Northwest Colorado. NWCDC intends to collaborate with other entities that produce tourism websites, such as the Northwest Colorado Cultural Heritage Program, to avoid duplication and ensure alignment. The website will leverage the mature brand of our tourism partners, such as the Steamboat Springs Chamber of Commerce, Visit Moffat, and Northwest Colorado Outdoor Coalition along with

Colorado Tourism to highlight assets throughout our communities and counties. For example, 55,000 monthly visitors to the Steamboat Springs Chamber website will learn about additional activities in the larger region. Thus, visitors have reasons to extend their overnight stays, generating more hotel/motel lodging taxes and supporting local retail and restaurant businesses, the accommodations sector, outdoor recreation, and tourism-related small businesses throughout the three counties. The direct and indirect spending from tourists will help create new jobs and support small businesses. Additionally, we will promote the website through NWCDC's existing social media: Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. We will optimize the website through search engine optimization (SEO) to elevate it on search engines.

The website will support ADA website compliance and offer Google Translate to ensure all information is readily accessible to diverse populations of visitors. The NWCDC website will allow us to share our technical assistance and resources with a broader group of diverse people of all races, genders, disabilities, faiths, orientations, and age demos than we are currently able to. The regional website ensures more diversity, equity, and inclusion by expanding our communications to more people around the region. The website will also intentionally feature diverse perspectives that celebrate and honor the contributions of our African American and Latinx leaders. The website will also feature people breaking through in non-traditional industries, such as woman-owned ranches or meat processing facilities, male nurses, etc.

5. What Regional Roadmap Strategy does this project support?

This project supports the Economic Diversification and Transition category of our Roadmaps plan. Specifically, this strategy is listed under Outdoor Recreation and Cultural Heritage Tourism in our official Roadmaps document.

6. Why is this project a priority over other projects and strategies identified in your Regional Roadmap Plan?

The NWCDC DOLA Roadmaps Strategic Plan identified the economic development website as a critical marketing strategy to support the growth of new industry clusters, including clean energy, light manufacturing, value-added agriculture/food processing, OREC/cultural heritage tourism, health care, technology, business services, and small business and entrepreneurship. The website unifies NW Colorado counties and municipalities under one website and brand, collectively driving economic development to the region rather than singling out any county or municipality. Leads generated by the website will be shared with all NWCDC member communities. The website will promote Northwest Colorado's competitive advantages to attract more business development in these sectors. By leveraging the mature brand of Steamboat Springs, the website will recruit companies to new industrial parks around the region, which will be highlighted in a properties section, and provide information on incentives and workforce programs for prospective and existing companies.

This project has been reviewed and approved unanimously by the NWCDC as a priority project for promoting the region and attracting business, tourism, and growth. Furthermore, the creation of content for the website will require collaboration and regional cooperation that requires the regional partners to coalesce around shared values and priorities. It will help internal stakeholders to clarify the regional vision. The project is a priority as it is an attainable and collective effort that has the potential to generate a variety of opportunities that benefit the region. The website project can be fully funded with the RTAP implementation funds, whereas other priority areas identified in the Regional Roadmaps Plan will require millions in investment and ongoing or longer-term efforts.

7. Describe the economic impact of this project.

Please include any relevant job creation, job retention and/or capital formation estimates that would impact the region's economy.** Include the method used to determine potential economic impact.

** Projects must comply with the EDA's outcome metrics with a direct connection to economic development initiatives that result in job creation, job retention, entrepreneurship and business development support, and/or capital formation. If assistance is needed with defining the metrics or data components of a project, please reach out to Bryce Jones (bryce.jones@state.co.us), Data Analyst with OEDIT's Rural Opportunity Office.

The project is expected to achieve the following metrics in alignment with the EDA's Performance Measurements and Evaluation:

Metric 1: Job growth in our underserved and economically distressed rural region—*The project is anticipated to attract 40 new companies that potentially create 280 direct jobs annually. Over the course of four years, the website can lead to the direct job creation of 1,120 jobs. We base this estimate on the conversion rate of the number of visitors to the site who will become prospective companies, tourists, and transplants to the region. An average of 5,000 visitors come to chambers of commerce and economic development websites in our region each month. According to industry standards, the conversion rate for a B2B services website to convert visits to qualified leads is 4.5%. Qualified leads are when visitors to your website reach out for more information or assistance. Of the number of qualified leads, we anticipate 1.5% will become successful economic development projects for NWCDC. Strong call-to-actions will funnel the visitors to local economic developers and regional partners who will assist with business attraction, expansion, and retention of new and existing companies. The estimated number of companies, tourists, and workers served by the website is 60,000 annually, of which 2,700 annually will become qualified leads. If 1.5% of those qualified leads become successful projects, 40 companies could relocate or expand in Northwest Colorado annually. Given that the median number of workers employed by companies in our region is on average about seven employees, these 40 companies could potentially create 280 direct jobs annually. Over the course of four years, the website can lead to the direct job creation of 1,120 jobs.*

Metric 2: Funding and private investment secured by entrepreneurs—While more difficult to give an exact dollar figure, the website also supports the growth of existing businesses by providing information on OEDIT incentive programs and resources for small businesses and workforce development programs. This will in turn lead to funding secured by entrepreneurs in our region as a direct result of EDA's investment in the website.

By showcasing community information, business development opportunities, properties and sites, state and local incentives, and workforce training programs in Northwest Colorado, our region will offer a compelling business case to companies looking to relocate or expand in Northwest Colorado. These qualified leads will turn into economic development projects that bring new jobs, private investments, and tax revenue to Northwest Colorado to diversify the economy and replace jobs lost to the sunset of coal.

8. List the counties and any municipalities impacted by this project. Regional Roadmap Team partners involved in this project.** List the organization, primary contact name and title for each.
**Projects must include at least 3 Regional Team Partners.

Counties impacted include Routt, Moffat, and Rio Blanco. Municipalities impacted include the Cities of Craig and Steamboat Springs, and the Towns of Hayden, Meeker, Oak Creek, Rangely, and Yampa.

Regional team partners include:

- 1) Tim Redmond, Routt County Commissioner, and NWCDC Chair*
- 2) Carly Thomson, Town of Meeker Community Development Manager and Town Planner*
- 3) Keith Hensley, Business Retention and Expansion Manager · Routt County Economic Development Partnership*
- 4) Sasha Nelson, Founder/Owner of various businesses in the creative, lodging/tourism, publishing, and community sectors*

9. Total cost of project
\$43,500
10. Will the project receive any other funding assistance? (Matching funds are not required for this grant.)
Yes
11. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, describe the other sources of funding assistance, including the names of public partners, and if possible the names of other top contributors, whether for financial or in-kind.
This project will be supported by a \$2,500 RTAP Implementation Award.