



COLORADO  
COUNCIL ON  
LEADERSHIP

A Boettcher Foundation Initiative:  
**THE COLORADO COUNCIL  
ON LEADERSHIP**



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## WE LEAD

transformational impact.

## WE BELIEVE

in the promise of Colorado and the potential of Coloradans. Every day we champion excellence across our state by investing in our high potential people and organizations because supporting their hard work and leadership will enable them to give back for years to come.

## WE LEVERAGE

the power of collaboration and connection. The Boettcher Foundation transforms communities by investing in courageous leadership and community building.

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The Boettcher Foundation is deeply grateful to White River Strategy (WRS) for their time and subject matter expertise in convening the Colorado Council on Leadership focus groups and for the preparation and publication of this paper. WRS has played a critical strategic role as thought partners and facilitation experts in launching this initiative. We are indebted to their full team for their leadership insights and investment in our mission.

# WELCOME

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What does it take to be the cornerstone of strategic leadership opportunities that achieve transformational impact in Colorado? How can leadership be leveraged for transformational impact? These curiosities led to a strategic review of the Boettcher Foundation’s work and a search to understand the leadership ecosystem which is impacting and influencing leaders and communities across Colorado.

The purpose of the leadership ecosystem initiative, also known as the Colorado Council on Leadership initiative, is “to build a connected, inclusive, and accessible leadership ecosystem across all 64 counties of Colorado.” The focus groups, webinars, and learning journeys that comprised the stakeholder engagement process were marked with rich dialogue and connection among colleagues from across Colorado. While each of the five regions and their respective communities are unique, there were multiple themes that emerged from the discussions regardless of geography.

**The leadership assets on which Colorado communities depend include:**



People



Educational institutions



Industry-specific associations and organizations



Local organizations



Funders

**Four core areas were identified that, if improved, would strengthen the Colorado leadership ecosystem. They are:**



Barriers to access



Diversification of leadership



Connection and cohesion between individuals, organizations, and communities



Leadership development

# Takeaways

The individuals who participated in focus groups were inspiring, driven, and innovative leaders, and they spoke about the other leaders in their communities who were not in the conversation. These participants and the many more who were mentioned during this process made one thing abundantly clear: human capital is the state's greatest asset.

At the core of what makes leaders and community champions who they are is a deep commitment to their community, a willingness to put in the work to make something happen, and the ability to bring others along with them. What makes Colorado communities flourish is not titles or institutions, programs or buildings, or leadership frameworks. The magic ingredient is those who see and work for a brighter tomorrow for the Centennial State and its many communities. Thus, rather than a title or position, leadership is a combination of activities and behaviors that involves influencing others.

Making strategic investments that further develop leaders, connect people and weave communities together presents a unique opportunity to embolden leaders to work collaboratively in addressing community challenges.

**It is clear through the work of the Council on Leadership that there is a desire to be more connected to one another, a need to focus on developing opportunities in specific geographic areas and places in the pipeline, and an aspiration to build connections between leaders that will allow all Coloradans to advance their communities and their work.**



## Moving Forward

The Colorado Council on Leadership initiative brought forth a number of opportunities to cultivate the leadership ecosystem at both the individual and systemic levels. The process also revealed four internal strengths of the Boettcher Foundation that uniquely position the organization to complete this work: mission alignment, statewide connections and knowledge, experience, and resources. Moving forward, the Boettcher Foundation will utilize a new strategic framework created as a result of this process to build upon the Foundation's history and clarify the role the Boettcher Foundation's initiatives and grants play in achieving transformational impact.

# INTRODUCTION

The Boettcher Foundation will build Colorado by being the cornerstone of strategic leadership opportunities that achieve transformational impact.

-Boettcher Foundation Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal (BHAG)

**B**HAGs are bold, falling in the gray area where reason and prudence might say “This is unreasonable,” but the drive for progress says, “We believe we can do it nonetheless.” As an organization that believes in the promise of Colorado and the potential of Coloradans, the Boettcher Foundation champions excellence across Colorado by investing in high potential people and organizations because supporting their hard work and leadership will enable them to give back for years to come. And, as such, the Foundation’s BHAG boldly states its intent to move leadership forward in Colorado.

Leadership is fundamental to strong and effective communities, individual career trajectories, and a cohesive Colorado. Because of the Foundation’s long history of investing in the development of leaders across the state, increasing the focus on human capital and leadership further aligns Boettcher resources and expertise to support Colorado’s greatest assets and needs. However, in order to become the cornerstone for leadership in Colorado, it is important for the Foundation to understand the current landscape in which leaders operate. It is only with this understanding that the Foundation can move toward its BHAG of investing in strategic leadership opportunities to achieve transformational impact.

This paper captures the intensive process Boettcher Foundation undertook to gain a clear understanding of this system -- the leadership ecosystem -- in Colorado.

## Key Definitions

To understand the context of the initiative and data, clarity around how the Boettcher Foundation uses and defines several phrases is paramount.

**Cornerstone:** A stone uniting two masonry walls; a key foundation on which something is constructed or developed.

**Community Leadership:** The action of organizing or influencing in order to address the many opportunities and challenges that a specific neighborhood, city, town, or region faces.

**Ecosystem:** A complex network or interconnected system. Within the context of leadership, the term ecosystem refers to the greater leadership environment in Colorado, including the communities, institutions, and formal and informal leaders who work together to invest in and connect leadership. The ecosystem refers to both the leadership elements and the connective tissue, which are the relationships that bind the elements of the ecosystem together.

**Leader:** The Boettcher Foundation believes all Coloradans can be leaders. A leader is defined by their commitment to their community, their willingness to step up and get things done, and their ability to bring the community in and along. Leaders of all ages, backgrounds, industries, and

geographies are important players in the Colorado leadership ecosystem, and this initiative sought to understand them, hear from them, and celebrate them. A leader is not defined by their formal position, status, title, or the volunteer positions they hold within the community. In many cases, informal leaders are the lifeblood of a community or a project.

**Transformational Impact:** When an action or initiative has substantial, long-term, positive effects. Transformational impact is marked by a result that is greater than the sum of its parts. It is often achieved through collaboration with multiple stakeholders who share and leverage resources to create a dramatic change.

## How to Read the Report

Throughout the report, the lessons learned, data collected, and some of the considerations that have come out of the Colorado Council on Leadership initiative are outlined. The report is representative but not reflective of all the data collected; rather, it is designed to describe the process and highlight high-level themes and takeaways to help inform the work moving forward.

► The subsequent pages are divided into two parts:

### IMPETUS & OVERVIEW

The first section provides context and background for the initiative, explaining why the Boettcher Foundation sought to understand the leadership ecosystem in Colorado.

### PROCESS

This section, the body of the paper, describes the process the Foundation designed to help answer the overarching questions. A summary of each step of the process is outlined. While the paper provides a broad overview of the full process, it takes an in-depth look at Step 4: Learn from Stakeholders.

# IMPETUS & OVERVIEW

What does it take to be the cornerstone of strategic leadership opportunities that achieve transformational impact in Colorado? How can leadership be leveraged for transformational impact? What does leadership mean to Coloradans?

These curiosities led to an initiative to better understand Colorado communities and how the Boettcher Foundation may leverage its core strategies and resources to elevate leadership throughout the state.

Success for this initiative was defined as having a deeper understanding of the informal, organic ecosystem already in place supporting Colorado communities, and how the Boettcher Foundation can deploy resources to strengthen collaborations or partnerships, empower individuals, and fill the gaps to move leadership forward across all of Colorado. While there was no predetermined destination, the Boettcher Foundation set out with a belief that, by focusing on leadership, Coloradans have the potential to advance the promise of Colorado and the potential of Coloradans.

The ecosystem consists of leadership elements and the connective tissue that links these elements together. The leadership elements are the people and organizations that exist within the ecosystem. Because Boettcher's investment in the potential of Coloradans is driven not by title or position, but by those who make change happen in their community, there is no formal definition or pre-defined idea of the people and institutions that comprise the ecosystem. The connective tissue is the relationships between the elements of the ecosystem. Examples include personal relationships between individuals, collaborative relationships between organizations, and transactional relationships between programs and their participants. **The lack of formal ecosystem "boundaries" is intentional - it was important that the scope of leadership was not limited in order to allow the ecosystem to be investigated in its broadest possible sense.**

The process the Foundation followed to investigate the system was marked by discussions with community members from diverse backgrounds and industries. The Boettcher Foundation knew it would not be able to connect with every stakeholder due to time, resources, and individual availability. Because of this, there was a focus on connecting with a broad and diverse group of stakeholders. While the transition to virtual meetings due to COVID-19 provided opportunity for greater participation, not all Coloradans were represented in the process.

Furthermore, because the Boettcher Foundation does not focus on specific issues or communities, it is uniquely situated to be the cornerstone for leadership in Colorado as an overarching, high-level concept,



rather than through the lens of specific issues, sectors, industries, walks-of-life, or communities.

This investigation into the leadership ecosystem is rooted in the concept of adaptive leadership, a framework developed by Drs. Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky at the Harvard Kennedy School more than 40 years ago.

**Adaptive leadership recognizes the existence of two types of problems: adaptive and technical.** This means that while still complex, the problems feature process-driven solutions and experts trained to solve them. In contrast, there

is no one expert or prescribed solution to an adaptive challenge, as the scope is vague, there is no set process, and no clear solution. Adaptive leadership brings many stakeholders to the table and recognizes challenges can be solved with many possible approaches.



With the understanding that leadership is an adaptive challenge, the Boettcher Foundation launched an initiative called the Colorado Council on Leadership - a broad term for the informal group of professionals, community leaders, and leadership practitioners who were involved in the stakeholder engagement process and an examination of the Colorado leadership ecosystem. The Council on Leadership was designed to convene and leverage the perspectives of individuals from across the state. As a portion of the year-long information gathering process, Boettcher spent eight months hosting conversations and meetings with more than 185 individuals and 140 organizations. These dialogues informed the understanding of the current state of leadership across Colorado, the challenges leaders face, and how communities may be supported with greater connectivity and investment in leadership.

While the essence of an ecosystem means it is always changing and is interconnected with other systems in a way that makes it impossible to capture in its entirety, the information outlined in this report summarizes the key themes of the Colorado leadership ecosystem as defined by those who participated.

# THE PROCESS

In order to learn more about the Colorado leadership ecosystem, the Boettcher Foundation utilized the following strategic process of data gathering and alignment:



Each stage of the process required Foundation staff and leadership to learn, grow, and realign their historical best practices with new takeaways. The in-depth process for each stage was recorded individually.

## STEP 1: Understand Organizational Strengths and Interests

In 2018, the Boettcher Foundation underwent a strategic review of its grantmaking focus and guidelines. Historically a funder of brick and mortar projects and academic and research scholarships, the Foundation clarified its funding priorities and reaffirmed its commitment to matching Foundation resources with Colorado's greatest needs in order to achieve transformational impact. Moving forward, the Boettcher Foundation remains committed to investing in the promise of Colorado and the potential of Coloradans.



**“We leverage the power of collaboration and connection. The Boettcher Foundation transforms communities by investing in courageous leadership and community building.”**

During the strategic review, the Boettcher Foundation Trustees set the following core strategies to inform the Foundation’s grantmaking and programmatic priorities:

**Convene.** We support the creation of and investment in opportunities to build a connected community. We gather and inspire Coloradans to revisit current efforts and develop new ideas to drive Colorado forward.

**Collaborate.** We support partnership efforts with key stakeholders around opportunities that advance Coloradans and communities. We leverage the expertise and resources of key partners, empowering us to accomplish more for Colorado.

**Learn.** We support the elevation of new approaches to solving Colorado’s greatest challenges. We support research and gather new knowledge to guide our investments, culture, and community-building.

**Lead.** We support the investment of our resources in organizations and initiatives that strive to innovate, impact, and improve the quality of life for Coloradans. We believe people are our greatest asset for achieving change and creating thriving communities.

The Foundation also set a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal (BHAG) during this process. It states: The Boettcher Foundation will build Colorado by being the cornerstone of strategic leadership opportunities that achieve transformational impact. This interest, along with Boettcher’s mission, vision, and core strategies, helped determine the focus area.

## STEP 2: Determine the Focus Area

Investment in human capital has been a pillar of the Boettcher Foundation’s work since its inception in 1937. The Foundation operates under the belief that investment in leadership pays off for decades, far after the philanthropic contribution has been spent. Whether it is through the scholarship program, support for early career biomedical researchers, or other initiative-based investments, Foundation resources have long been used to support leaders and organizations who tackle big community challenges.

With a long history of human capital investments and many strategies to consider when determining how to have transformational impact within the leadership ecosystem, the Boettcher Foundation reaffirmed its

commitment to investing in people. The next step in the initiative was to undertake a year-long process to understand the Colorado leadership landscape and to hear from stakeholders throughout the state.

## STEP 3: Understand the Landscape

With an initial curiosity about leadership as a guide, the Boettcher Foundation completed a national leadership scan in summer of 2019. Researchers sought to understand the leadership landscape across the country, and the final report identified trends, best practices, and possible gaps. Coupled with this national review was a study of Colorado programs and organizations working in the leadership space. The analysis of the Colorado landscape included a scan of the work of other Colorado foundations, including the Shifting Ground: Colorado’s Leadership Landscape report completed by the Colorado Health Foundation.

The leadership scan revealed a multitude of outstanding leadership initiatives, but the connective tissue between entities was less evident. Additionally, there appeared to be clusters of leadership resources in some communities and less opportunities in other areas. With these findings as a guide, the Boettcher Foundation turned to stakeholders to learn more about the initial observations and understand how they impact Coloradans.

## STEP 4: Learn from Stakeholders

To explore these initial findings further, the Colorado Council on Leadership’s engagement with stakeholders was defined by three **key activities**:

### FOCUS GROUPS & DESIGN SESSION

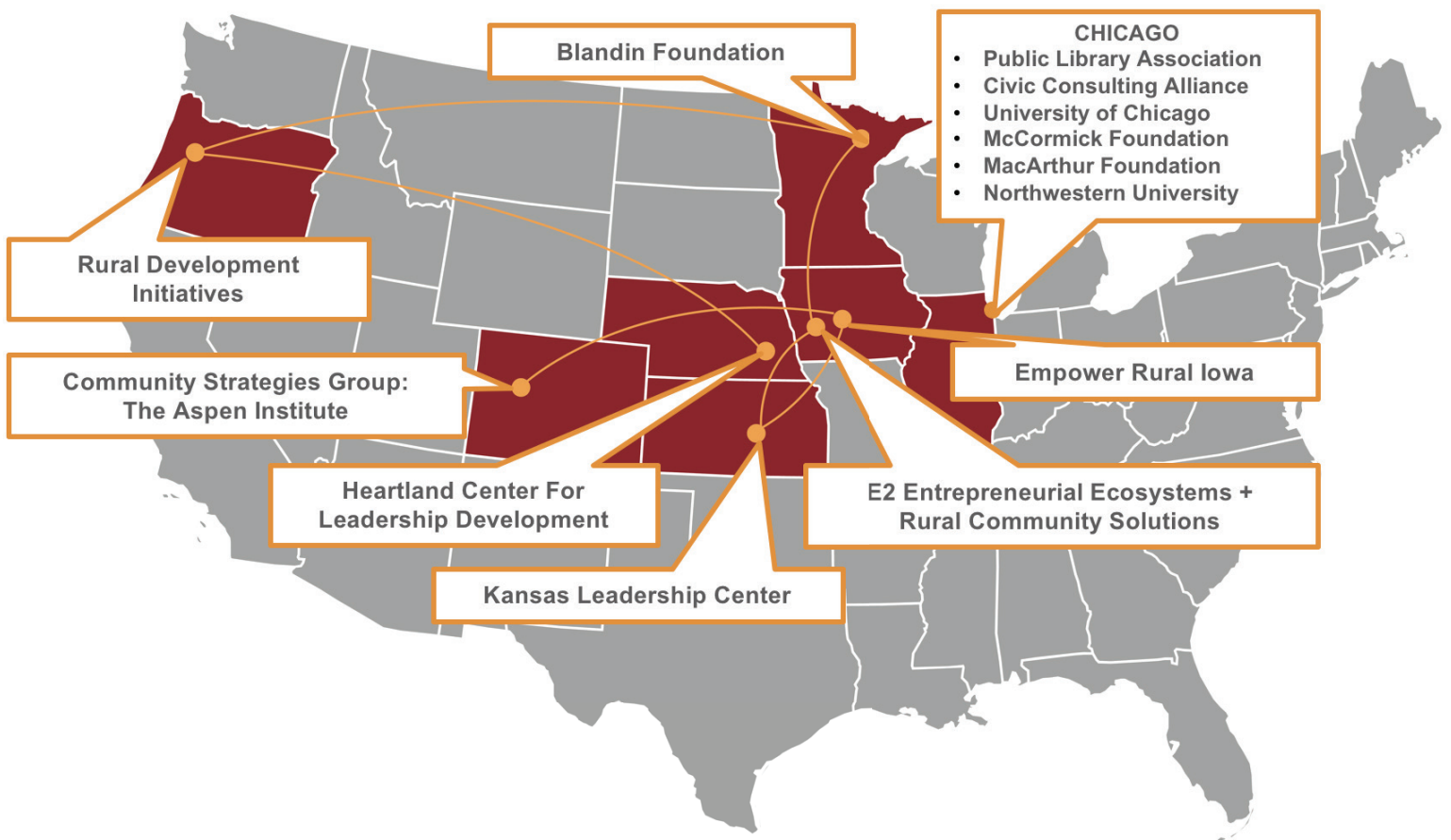
A group of more than 45 leaders from across Colorado was brought together for three sessions: two focus groups and one design session. The group was curated to represent a variety of industries, communities and organizations. They served as Boettcher Foundation thought partners as the organization oriented itself to the leadership landscape and explored the potential of a stronger ecosystem.

### REGIONAL FOCUS GROUPS

As many Coloradans say, “If you have seen one community, you’ve seen one community.” To that end, a series of regional focus groups were curated to understand the experiences of leaders across the state. Through five regional focus groups, 120 people shared their leadership experiences, triumphs, and challenges. Appendix A provides a snapshot of each region’s takeaways.

## JOURNEYS

With the Colorado context in mind, the Boettcher Foundation took two (virtual) journeys to investigate bright spots in the leadership landscape across the country. One journey dove into the Chicago leadership ecosystem, and the second explored leadership development strategies across rural America. Over the course of the two experiences, Foundation staff and individuals from other organizations met with 13 organizations from eight states. They ranged from the MacArthur Foundation in Chicago, Illinois to Rural Development Initiatives in Eugene, Oregon (see map below).



At the outset of the initiative, the global COVID-19 pandemic and its future implications were unknown and unanticipated. When the pandemic became a reality for Coloradans in early March, the Foundation was forced to re-evaluate its well-laid plans. The in-person design sessions and focus groups were quickly transitioned onto a digital platform, and the journeys to Chicago and Nebraska became virtual. The plan to visit various Colorado communities over the summer were put on pause and alternatives were considered. While there was initial frustration with the changes and sadness over the lack of human connection, the benefits of a virtual connection quickly became apparent. For example, by transitioning to an online format, the regional focus groups were able to easily span geographic boundaries and bring people together for robust discussions across hundreds of miles, significantly increasing the number of participants able to share their experiences with the Boettcher team.

The pandemic also presented an opportunity to experience, in real time, how to leverage a network or community of practice to address a common challenge. During a focus group discussion, it became clear that cohort-based leadership development programs were up against an unprecedented challenge - how do you transition a model that relies on in-person connectivity to an online format? The Council on Leadership took the opportunity to create a series of webinars that allowed leadership programs to come together and brainstorm creative solutions. The webinars expanded beyond COVID-19 and delved into other topics of interest, including collaboration between programs and alumni relations. The ease of video conferencing enabled the Foundation to leverage external expertise, for example, when individuals from Harvard University and McKinsey & Company joined the group to discuss their respective alumni engagement strategies.

With the transition to virtual meetings and the ability to hear from more stakeholders in the leadership ecosystem at one time, a robust group of voices joined in the discussion. Each webinar, journey, and focus group was marked by rich dialogue and connection between colleagues new and old across Colorado. The overarching, statewide themes learned from these discussions are shared in the following sections.

**“What inspires me is the idea of vision. Vision is the perfect combination of hindsight, insight, and foresight. Foresight is easy – I envision a time when leadership is reflective of the diversity of our state and nation. Insight is also easy – we have tools and research that inform our work. It is hindsight that connects all the dots. We stand on the shoulders of giants who have paved the path for us, and from them we learned that it is only when we work together that we can overcome the most challenging of barriers.”**

## ► STATEWIDE FINDINGS AND THEMES

In many ways, Colorado’s leadership landscape is as varied as its topography. In other ways, there are several common threads that weave all 104,185 square miles together. What is consistent across all 64 counties is the pride people have in their communities and the desire to improve their quality of life. The way the statewide trends present themselves may be slightly different from one community to another; but overall, many of the successes and challenges aligned among and between groups.

It is worth noting that a theme is not an indication of universal agreement; instead, a theme is the overarching label for similar concepts mentioned by a considerable number of participants.

The following themes were identified during the stakeholder engagement process:

### Assets:



People



Educational institutions



Industry-specific associations and organizations



Local organizations



Funders

### Challenges & Opportunities:

1

Barriers to access

2

Diversification of leadership

3

Connection and cohesion among individuals, organizations, and communities

4

Leadership development

\*\* For more information regarding each region’s themes, please see Appendix A.

## Assets:

The leadership assets in Colorado are plentiful, ranging from specific institutions or programs to individuals and informal communities to elements of community culture. People from various regions throughout the state shared a love of place, whether that be the large urban centers, the mountains, the high desert, or the rolling plains. Stakeholders have a passion for Colorado and its communities, and leaders feel compelled to continue to work to make it a better place.

Although specific assets of regions are explored in the regional snapshots, several overarching assets are outlined below.



### People

Outside of specific organizations, the most common asset mentioned was people. In some groups, youth were identified as a community's greatest strength. In others, they talked about the general profile of the community members as the driving force behind community vitality. Across the board, Coloradans were described as passionate, diverse, multi-talented, and well-connected. Focus groups were filled with stories of driven individuals and groups of community members addressing challenges and solving problems, often in the face of resource scarcity and adversity.

**“I was really encouraged by the passion in our group. Lots of different perspectives and a great growth mindset. How can we do more to work together better to push Colorado to its fullest potential?”**



### Educational institutions

In each discussion, the role educational institutions play in the leadership ecosystem at either a community or statewide level emerged. In rural Colorado specifically, K-12 schools serve as community hubs and sources of training and opportunities. Colleges and universities serve an important role throughout the state as anchor institutions, i.e. the enduring organizations that play a vital role in their local communities and economies. Higher education institutions deliver leadership training to students, invest in their staff in meaningful ways, and have a seat at nearly every community table. Outside of the traditional role of higher education, institutions serve the state in unique and important ways. For example, with offices in 60 counties, CSU Extension is an incredible network in itself that serves multiple regions in Colorado.





## Industry-specific associations and organizations

Industry-specific associations and organizations are instrumental in building connections with leaders and organizations outside of one's local community or region. In numerous conversations with rural Coloradans, an industry association was the primary point of connectivity with colleagues on the Front Range. Specific associations and organizations mentioned included: Colorado Municipal League, Colorado Counties, Inc., Philanthropy Colorado, Colorado Association of School Executives, Economic Development Council of Colorado, Colorado Association of Ski Towns, and the Community Resource Center (CRC).

**“We are well connected to other areas (of the state) in terms of our own industry focus, but not well-linked across those lines.”**



## Local organizations

The focus groups illuminated the power of local organizations and initiatives. While many nonprofits and small businesses were mentioned, there was an emphasis on organizations throughout the state that specifically focus on leadership development at either an organizational or programmatic level. Chamber leadership programs were frequently mentioned as examples. In communities where they exist, leadership programs act as a resource and a place of connection for local leaders.

Outside of specific leadership programs, local organizations are responsive to the unique needs of the community and are led by community members, often resulting in an extraordinary amount of trust among the community. The leadership roles held by local organizations allow community members to gain leadership experience through their work. Of note, community foundations were cited as important local conveners and leaders, outside of their traditional role as funders. The importance of local organizations and initiatives was further highlighted by COVID-19, as many participants shared stories of local groups coming together to organize a response.



## Funders

Funders, both local and statewide, were identified as assets to the leadership landscape in Colorado. Philanthropic institutions have the unique opportunity to bring organizations together and serve as a resource to learn best practices or innovate ideas from across different sectors and regions. At a local level, community foundations and family foundations were seen as key elements of the ecosystem. There are several Colorado funders, governmental and private, with a focus on statewide giving and have a strong presence in communities. Specific statewide funders mentioned included: Colorado Trust, El Pomar's Regional Councils, Colorado Health Foundation, Department of Local Affairs, and CRC's Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD).

## Challenges & Opportunities:

Throughout the data collection process, four core topic areas were identified that, if improved, would strengthen the Colorado leadership ecosystem. As is often the case, these ideas were discussed both as challenges and as opportunities, as the fine line between the two typically depends on a person's perspective. While each region may have discussed a topic in one context or the other, the concepts were combined on a statewide level to show the interconnectedness of the topic.

The four key topics that surfaced across all conversations were barriers to access; diversification of leadership; leadership development; and connection and cohesion between individuals, organizations, and communities.

1

### Barriers to access

While there may be a significant number of leadership development opportunities across the state, there are individuals and communities who do not experience the same level of access. In rural Colorado, there are relatively few development opportunities due to limited resources and/or low population densities. Neighboring communities can be geographically separated by mountain passes or many miles, making collaborative programming and resource sharing logistically unfeasible. Even statewide programs, which are offered by some Front Range organizations, are difficult to access due to financial, geographic, or technology barriers. In rural Colorado, even neighboring communities can be separated by mountain passes or many miles, making collaborative programming and resource sharing logistically unfeasible.

In communities with leadership development resources, not all community members enjoy equal access. Barriers to access take a variety of forms including financial and time constraints, lack of awareness, or an absence of programming for specific demographics. For example, many community leadership programs are not available to leaders without formal titles.

2

### Diversification of leadership

Two primary concerns were expressed in relation to the diversification of leadership. First, the demographic breakdown of individuals who occupy leadership positions and participate in leadership development programming does not represent the demographics of Colorado's overall population. Second, particularly in rural regions, the same individuals are continuously tapped to take on leadership positions, limiting the voices heard regarding community issues and opportunities.

In nearly every conversation, the need to increase the diversity among Colorado leaders was mentioned. In this context, the reference is to people in formal leadership positions. There was acknowledgement throughout the discussions that individuals from all backgrounds serve as leaders in their respective communities, but greater diversity in all senses: racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, gender identity, age, and ability is needed within the traditional leadership structure. Participants spoke to the importance of diverse representation to ensure broad and inclusive thinking for an increasingly diverse state.



**“We need new, diverse voices. The vision and voice should be broader, and we need help getting there.”**

### **Develop a leadership pipeline**

In order to diversify the voices at the table and increase the number of people who identify as leaders, the development of a leadership pipeline is necessary. Participants highlighted the importance of integrating all community members into leadership roles, regardless of age or background, by providing access points for individuals to incrementally gain experience and knowledge.

**“How do we remove barriers for community members who are informal leaders to move into more formal leadership roles?”**

In rural communities, there is often a small group of people who identify as leaders and occupy leadership roles. A number of factors play into the leadership pipeline challenge in rural Colorado. Rural leaders spoke about the absence of leadership development opportunities, the need to develop a culture of leadership among youth and young adults, and the barriers to newcomers that can be created by tight-knit communities. Established rural leaders expressed a love of their communities and also an awareness that wearing too many hats can leave them overwhelmed and burnt out.

In the more populated areas, a different set of challenges contributes to the need for a stronger leadership pipeline. First, a lack of coordination between leaders, leadership programs, leaders, and other community initiatives makes it difficult for leaders to progress through a leadership development journey that incrementally increases skills and responsibility. Additionally, it was noted that for many, there is a gap in the pipeline at certain experience, skill, or formal seniority levels. It was expressed that there are more programs for mid-to-senior-level leaders and fewer opportunities for early-career and/or informal leaders.

**3**

### **Connection and cohesion among individuals, organizations and communities**

In some ways, an understanding of the connectivity within the leadership system was the original pursuit of the Council on Leadership. In the context of this theme, cohesion goes beyond awareness or periodic communication. Cohesion suggests interrelatedness or a sense of continuity. Organizations frequently expressed a desire to understand where they fit in the greater leadership ecosystem, and how they could more effectively ‘plug in’ to organizations adjacent to them to enhance their work.

Throughout the data collection process, connection and cohesion was identified as an area of opportunity on multiple levels: between organizations, between individuals, between individuals and organizations, and between communities. Further exploration of each level is outlined below.

### **Connection and cohesion among organizations**

A primary incentive for greater connectivity between organizations was an ability to share resources. Throughout the webinar series, directors of leadership programs talked about the value of a community of practice, or a group of colleagues with whom to connect on a regular basis to share knowledge, contacts, participants, and even financial resources. The desire to reduce the duplication of services was frequently mentioned. It was noted that the creation of strong communication pathways that allow for coordination and awareness of other efforts would be helpful in mitigating the duplication of efforts.

**“We should develop opportunities for shared curriculum, scholarship money, technology, evaluation tools, and streamlined grant processes.”**

### **Connection and cohesion among individuals**

The timing of the focus groups, right in the midst of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, undoubtedly heightened a feeling of isolation in community members across the state. Regardless, the desire for more connection with other leaders was undoubtedly one of the most poignant themes throughout conversations. The need for mentorship was mentioned frequently, particularly in regard to mentorship opportunities across community lines.

**“It can be isolating to be a leader in rural Colorado”**

In addition to traditional mentorship opportunities, there was a strong push for peer-to-peer relationships. Several participants spoke about building a network of peers across the state. People acknowledged the power of relationships with individuals statewide both in similar lines of work and from different industries. A desire for more effective and frequent connection with other leaders was perhaps the most common theme throughout the data collection process. Interestingly, while COVID-19 has caused significant physical isolation, the increased use of technology has also made connection more possible.

### **Connection and cohesion among individuals and organizations**

Leaders expressed a lack of understanding around the opportunities available to them, the programs and opportunities they are qualified for, and the relationships between the different programs. Participants frequently mentioned the need for a comprehensive and convenient resource that summarizes and categorizes leadership resources and

organizations. A tool to identify options for leaders to engage with developmental opportunities would encourage participation and increase access to leadership programs.

### **Connection and cohesion among communities**

The desire for connection transcends individuals and organizations. When considering leadership in the broadest sense, many people felt that greater connectivity with other communities would be invaluable. In the vein of decreasing duplication of work, several people shared that if they knew how other communities were handling specific challenges, they could save considerable time problem-solving. For many, the focus group was a welcome opportunity to connect with individuals in other communities and lay the groundwork for this type of collaboration.

**“There is a gap in growth and professional development opportunities outside of traditional chamber-led programs and programming for students. There are few offerings for young or mid-career professionals, particularly in more rural areas.”**

## **4**

### **Leadership development**

Leadership development is a thread woven throughout the other three opportunities. In the context of this analysis, ‘leadership development’ is defined as formal programs, opportunities, and activities designed to connect, empower, and educate leaders. When available, leadership development opportunities are considered an asset to the ecosystem. The absence of developmental opportunities exacerbates the challenges of accessibility and the diversification of leadership and the leadership pipeline.

Leadership development programs and organizations are responsible for the growth and cultivation of leaders throughout Colorado and, as such, serve as important hubs or connection points throughout the ecosystem. Opportunities to leverage existing leadership development programs and invest in areas without programming were frequently discussed as ways to enhance connectivity and access.

**“My single biggest regret in my work in rural communities was that we didn’t focus first and foremost on leadership; on human capital. We need human capital way before we need financial capital or infrastructure. We can’t just build things, we need to develop the human capital to lead the community.”**


## ► WHAT WE LEARNED

From the outset of this initiative, there was a consistent desire by participants to define leadership and the context of the leadership ecosystem. What are the values we hold? Who is a leader and who isn't a leader? With a steadfast commitment to investigating leadership across Colorado in its most general sense, the Council on Leadership worked diligently to keep the definition of leadership broad. The intent of the initiative was to map the leadership ecosystem in its most basic form, answering the questions - What moves communities forward, and what gets in their way?

Through the conversations, it became evident the Boettcher Foundation's curiosity is perhaps not about leadership, at least in the traditional sense, at all. It is about the spirit inside the woman from Eastern Colorado who rallied a community to save a local movie theater, and purpose that drives the young man from Denver who is working tirelessly to create a pathway for people of color not only to have a seat at the table, but also, to host the conversation.

**At the core of what makes leaders who they are is a deep commitment to their community, a willingness to put in the work to make something happen, and the ability to bring others along with them.**

What makes Colorado communities flourish is not titles, institutions, programs, buildings, or leadership frameworks. The people who participated in focus groups were inspiring, driven, and innovative leaders, and they spoke about many leaders in their communities who were not part of the initial stakeholder conversations. So, while the Boettcher Foundation is interested in supporting difference makers, it is not because of a perceived human capital problem. In fact, human capital is the state's greatest asset.



**Transformational impact is made by individuals across the state working to make their communities better, and it is in those people, those doers and difference makers, that the Foundation seeks to invest its resources.**

## STEP 5: Align Internal Strengths with External Data

The Colorado Council on Leadership initiative and the stakeholder engagement process provided an in-depth look at the experiences of leaders across the state and brought forth numerous compelling opportunities to invest in human capital and cultivate the leadership ecosystem at both the individual and systemic levels.

Based on this data, the combination of four internal strengths of the Boettcher Foundation uniquely position the organization to complete this work.

- 1. Mission alignment:** Leadership and human capital investments have been pillars of the Boettcher Foundation since its inception in 1937. With a steadfast commitment to the betterment of Colorado, the Foundation operates under the belief that investment in leadership pays off for decades, far after the philanthropic contribution has been made.
- 2. Statewide connections and knowledge:** The Boettcher Foundation has deep connections with individuals and organizations across the entire state. Because of these ties, the Foundation understands and appreciates community issues and local difference makers in both rural and urban communities.
- 3. Experience:** Investment in high-potential individuals has been a key strategy to achieving the mission of the Boettcher Foundation since the beginning. Over the last 83 years, the Foundation has worked to achieve the vision of the Boettcher family by supporting people and organizations at their inflection points. Whether investing in young leaders as they chart their post-secondary educational paths or funding the ideas of early career biomedical researchers, Boettcher resources have long been used to catapult people and ideas to the next level. Similarly, the Boettcher Foundation has historically invested in Colorado communities by investing in transformational projects identified by local leaders and communities.
- 4. Resources:** The Boettcher Foundation is able to invest both financial and human resources into under-resourced leaders and in the overall health of the leadership ecosystem in Colorado.

With a strong history as a trusted convener and committed investor in the future of Colorado, the Boettcher Foundation is well-positioned to both strengthen and elevate the Colorado leadership ecosystem.

# STEP 6: Develop a Strategy and Actionable Plan

After aligning the learnings from the Colorado Council on Leadership with the Foundation’s work, Boettcher developed a new strategic framework to build upon the Foundation’s history and clarify the role the Boettcher Foundation’s new initiatives and grants will play in achieving transformational impact. The strategic framework was developed by overlaying the takeaways from the initiative with the Boettcher mission and vision. When paired with the data collected, it was evident that the Boettcher Foundation’s mission and vision is a strong base from which the organization’s strategy can provide direction and support for lasting impact.

Outlined below, the framework separates the focus of the Foundation into three categories: the promise of Colorado, the potential of Coloradans, and the Boettcher legacy.

PROMISE OF COLORADO	
<p><b>Transformational Initiatives</b></p> <p>Approaching challenges and opportunities in new, innovative ways and conceptualizing problems differently takes courage and risk. As such, we invest in organizations and initiatives that seek to create innovative new paths to upend the status quo and create positive change throughout Colorado communities.</p>	<p><b>Community Connections</b></p> <p>Supporting and developing connections that create a sum greater than their parts is vital to the health of communities in our state. As such, we invest in initiatives or infrastructure projects that are bringing together, supporting, or deepening the connections between individuals and/or organizations.</p>
POTENTIAL OF COLORADO	
<p><b>Doers and Difference Makers</b></p> <p>We believe people make things happen. We understand the value of putting resources into individuals in order to support them as they champion ideas and initiatives. We invest in doers and difference makers.</p>	<p><b>Increasing Opportunities</b></p> <p>Developing the leaders and community champions of tomorrow starts today. As such, we invest in Colorado’s next generation of leaders by bringing new voices to the table, addressing systemic shortages, and keeping the best minds in Colorado.</p>
BOETTCHER LEGACY	
<p><b>Legacy Investments</b></p> <p>As the stewards of the Boettcher Family’s legacy, we continue to support our donors’ intents by investing in organizations in the state for which they personally held great passion and regard.</p>	<p><b>Colorado Treasures</b></p> <p>The Boettcher’s built or invested in some of Colorado’s most iconic places and spaces. As such, we honor and continue their commitment to building Colorado through community infrastructure projects that do more than just provide a roof and walls. We invest in projects that showcase and preserve Colorado’s greatest treasures.</p>

This framework will be used to assist external stakeholders and Foundation leadership alike in determining if and where new initiatives or grants fit into the overarching Boettcher Foundation strategy. The strategy framework crystalizes the Foundation’s purpose and clearly aligns the learnings of the Colorado Council on Leadership with future initiatives and funding.

As the Foundation continues to develop and refine its actionable plan to expand its investment in the Colorado leadership ecosystem, one thing has never been more certain: **the Boettcher Foundation believes in the promise of Colorado and the potential of Coloradans.**



# APPENDIX A: REGIONAL SNAPSHOTS

The following pages represent a summary of topics discussed in the respective regional focus groups. Each focus group was asked the same set of questions which were discussed in breakout groups. Each snapshot includes common themes and a small sample of examples that were discussed by that particular region. Of note, because each community is unique even within one region, not all themes hold true for every county or community.

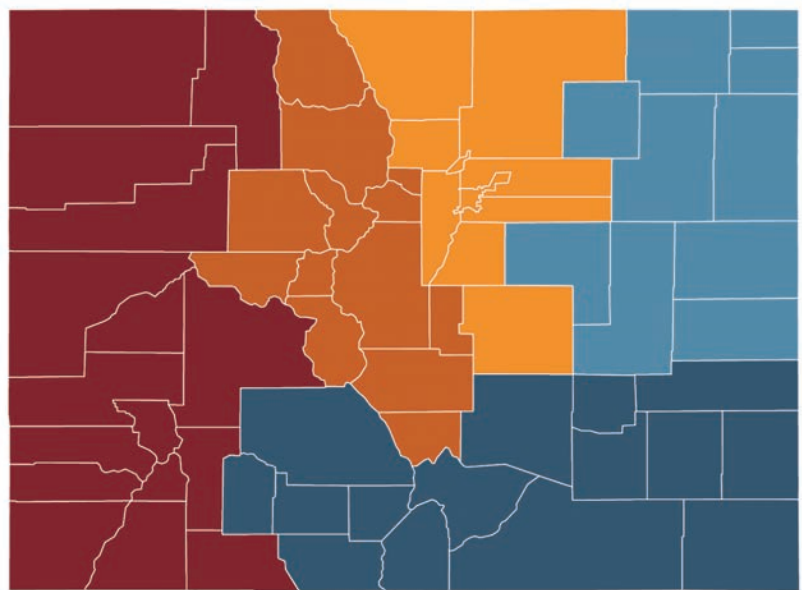
## ► PURPOSE

The purpose of these snapshots is twofold. First, each provides a high-level summary of the themes from each regional conversation. Themes articulated are organized into assets, opportunities, and challenges. Though comments were grouped into themes for ease of analysis, the information is based on the perceptions of participants and was neither verified for accuracy nor altered. It should be noted the specific organizations and institutions named in the summaries were shared by the participants, and as such, are dependent on the knowledge and area(s) of interest of the attendees and do not encompass every organization.

The second intent of these snapshots is to categorize themes to compare and contrast regions. When appropriate, the same term was used to label a similar theme, even if they were presented differently in individual regions.

## ► PARTICIPANTS

The regional focus groups were selected based on the districts defined by Colorado Counties, Inc. Although individuals from almost all 64 counties were invited to participate in a focus group, the attendees represented 44 counties from across the state.



■ Eastern ■ Front Range ■ Mountain ■ Southern ■ Western

## ► FOCUS GROUPS

Participants in each regional focus group were asked the following questions:

- What are the leadership assets?
- What leadership development programs or groups are available to local leaders?
- How do leaders work together? What is working?
- How are you connected to the rest of the state?
- How would you like to be connected to the rest of the state?
- What would stronger, more productive connectivity with the rest of the state look like?
- What would be the benefit of a stronger, more connected leadership ecosystem?
- What are some tangible examples of what the “connective tissue” could look like?

**“In many ways, our communities are alike. They have different opportunities and challenges, but very similar successes.”**



# Eastern Region



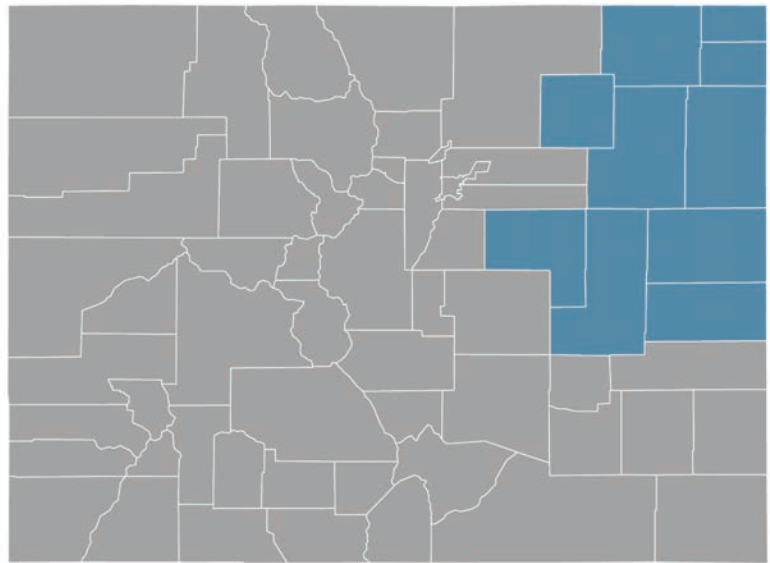
**21 PEOPLE**



**8 COUNTIES**

Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Lincoln,  
Logan, Morgan, Phillips,  
Sedgwick, and Yuma.

\*Only counties represented by  
attendees are listed.



## Assets

### Educational networks and institutions

The K-12 education system's extracurricular leadership programs are some of the most valuable assets in the Eastern Region. These include leadership programs such as 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). Since schools are the natural convening centers for youth and adults alike in communities, groups and institutions that aid the development of educators and administrators is an important element of the leadership landscape. University and college systems, CSU extension offices, Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), and Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) were mentioned as not only contributing to the success of the region; but also, connecting the region to the rest of the state.

### Local government

The Eastern Region is completely rural and, as such, has only a few local foundations and organizations to support and aid in the development of communities and leaders. In their stead, the local county and town governments contribute heavily to leadership in the area. National Association of Counties (NACO), Colorado Counties Inc. (CCI), Colorado Municipal League (CML), county commissioners, and town councils are primary sources of leadership and leadership development.

## Funders

In addition to providing resources that are not available locally, statewide funders play a key role in bringing local leaders from various communities together to address issues at a regional level. Community Resource Center's Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD), Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), and El Pomar Regional Councils were examples given during the discussion.

## Personal commitment to the region

Individuals have strong ties to the region and are loyal to their communities. In many cases, people shared stories of their families settling in eastern Colorado generations ago. While youth often leave to pursue educational opportunities, those who choose to move back are often willing to make long-term commitments to the community and are unlikely to move away.

## Opportunities

### People

Many leadership opportunities in the Eastern Region revolve around youth. Students who participate in clubs and extracurricular activities receive leadership training and experience; however, they are rarely asked to help on projects outside of school. Students are an untapped resource who can provide a unique perspective to benefit community initiatives and organizations. Additionally, one way to attract young adults back to their home community is to provide meaningful leadership opportunities.

**“If you want to build homegrown talent, you have to invest time & energy and build relationships - Give the baton to people who you think can lead - Build the right relationships with the right people: grow their own in small communities.”**

### Connection and cohesion

The counties in the Eastern Region face many of the same challenges. There is an opportunity to bring leaders together to share resources and best practices in order to streamline processes, save valuable time and resources, and decrease duplicative efforts.

## Challenges

### Independent, isolated communities

Geographically expansive, Eastern Colorado participants felt the region is one of the most disconnected regions in the state. A multi-hour drive from the Front Range and separated by the

continental divide from the Western Slope, the eastern plains can feel isolated from other regions of the state. Additionally, the communities within the region can feel isolated from one another. This geographic separation as well as a strong sense of local pride makes for strong, independent communities, but at times can pose a challenge when collaboration or connectivity is the goal.

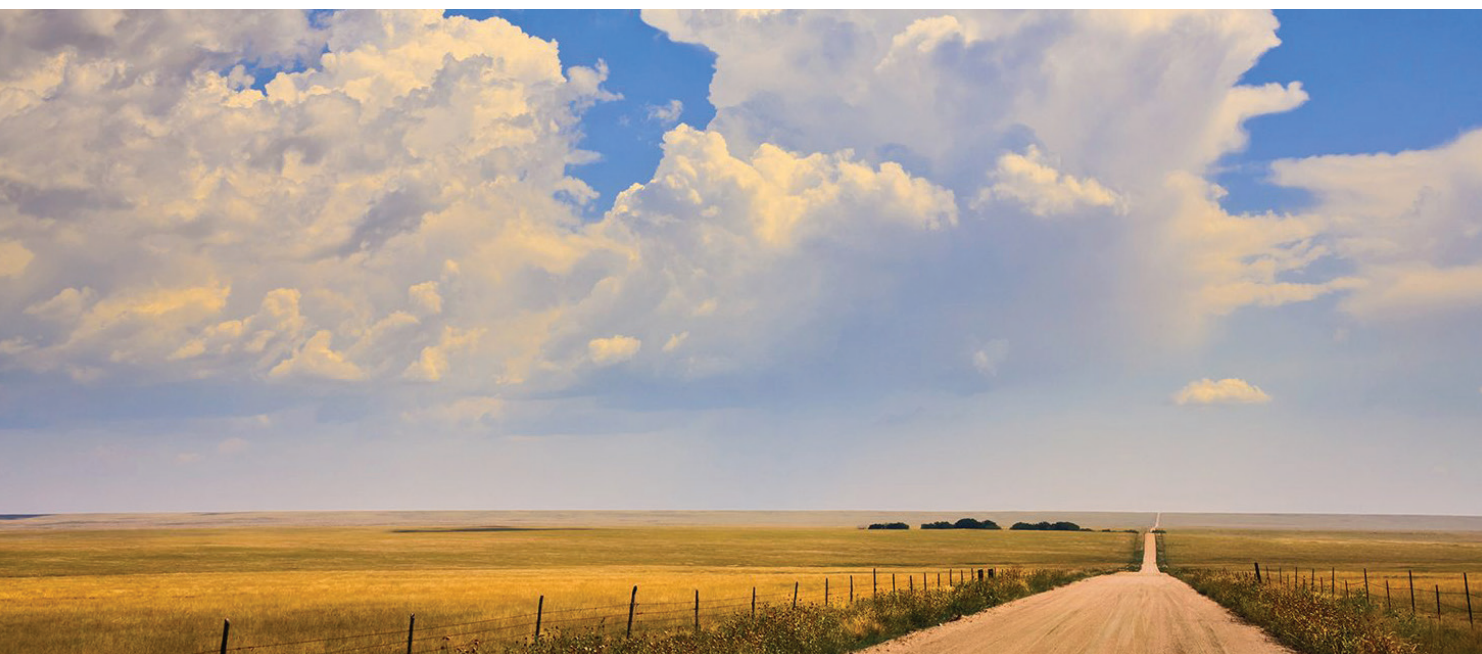
## Leadership pipeline

Although developing and engaging youth is a great opportunity for the region, young people can also be the region's greatest weakness. Upon graduation, many young people leave their communities to pursue educational opportunities and do not return, creating a gap in the leadership pipeline. Even those who do return can find it challenging to access leadership support and professional opportunities. Additionally, the same people are frequently involved with every opportunity, and those who are not already involved have a hard time getting a seat at the table.

**"I have young people who want to come to the table but aren't getting that invite."**

## Barriers to access

When asked about leadership development resources, focus group participants expressed a lack of access to development opportunities. There are few (if any) leadership development programs available locally. As a result, individuals must make the resource-intensive decision to participate in Front Range-based programs if they want to pursue leadership development training. Furthermore, many community members do not hold formal leadership positions, instead see themselves as community champions, and there are limited leadership development opportunities for individuals without formal titles.



# Front Range Region

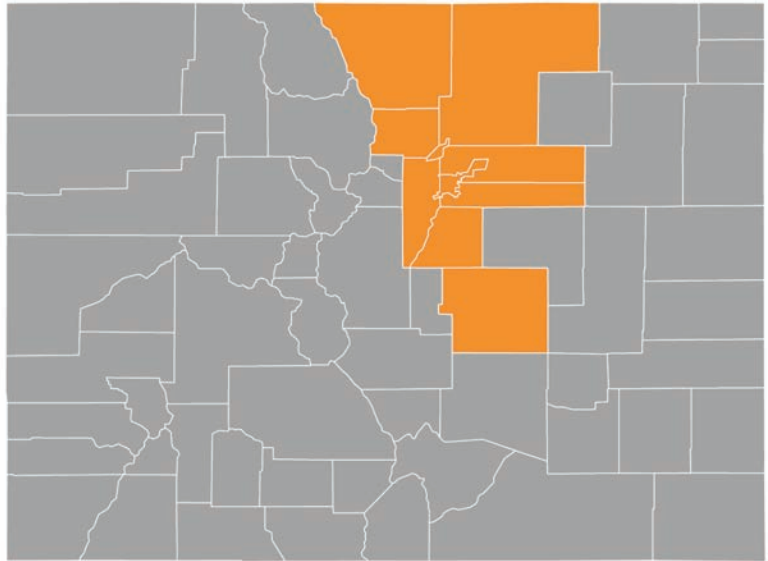


**28 PEOPLE**



**10 COUNTIES**

Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld.



## Assets

The Front Range is home to 4.5 million of the 5.4 million Coloradans. With its population density and geographically central location, the Front Range acts as a hub for many institutions and organizations in the state, providing residents access to a multitude of resources.

### Educational networks & institutions

The Front Range is home to many of the state's colleges and universities. These education institutions provide opportunities for formal leadership development and training. They also boast large networks that connect the schools to leaders in a variety of industries. Additionally, the largest K-12 school districts are located on the Front Range, and as such, they are important members of the ecosystem as employers, educators, and influencers of the statewide education system.

### Leadership development programs and organizations

The Front Range is home to many leadership development organizations and programs, dedicated to supporting individuals from all sectors, in all stages of their leadership, and from different backgrounds. For many Front Range leaders, there is ample opportunity for leadership development. Of note, as with any region, not all Front Range communities have equal opportunity, and access to leadership development varies from community to community.

## Funders

The largest foundations and state funders are located along the Front Range. While some run their own leadership programs, others support the development of leaders by funding specific leadership programs or more broadly through their funding strategies and community outreach.

## Opportunities

### Leadership pipeline

There is not always a clear pathway for new and informal leaders to enter the leadership pipeline, nor do they automatically trust the more established leaders. Intentional outreach must be conducted to engage and build trust with new leaders. Thoughtful reflection regarding who holds the current spaces at the table, and the use of collective influence to make sure there is space for nontraditional voices, could create effective change.

“This ecosystem has potential to create connectivity and exposure - which changes how we think.”

### Connection and cohesion

A common theme in the Front Range Region was a desire to develop strategies for leaders to communicate about best practices, brainstorm like-problems, and share resources. Mentorship was often mentioned as a way to facilitate these desired connections.

## Challenges

### Diversification of leadership

Drawing leaders together who do not have traditional positions and titles or are from historically marginalized groups is a challenge across the Front Range. Those who already occupy leadership positions have power and access to resources and are repeatedly tapped to participate in additional leadership roles. Underrepresented communities and those outside of formal leadership positions can experience roadblocks when trying to find ways into this often-exclusive system. Creating an environment that welcomes diverse experiences and leadership roles is a challenge that focus group members felt must be overcome to have a successful and robust ecosystem that is truly representative of Colorado.

“I’m very intrigued and excited about creating an ecosystem that draws together leaders who are not traditionally defined by position/title. A powerful ecosystem that engages informal community/regional leaders, along with leaders who are in traditional positions of power would greatly help advance the state’s ability to address the challenges of equity and racial justice.”

## Barriers to access

There are financial, cultural, and informational barriers that often prevent diverse groups or individuals from accessing leadership training and formal positions. Additionally, there is a tendency for leaders from similar backgrounds (e.g., white, formal leaders) to approach problems in similar ways and work harmoniously together because of their shared experiences. So, while many acknowledge the need for diverse voices at the leadership table, new individuals who come from a different background often feel like they are always the lone voice providing a different perspective or representing communities entirely. This can be uncomfortable, exhausting, and tokenizing for these individuals.

## Connection and cohesion

The Front Range is home to most of the leadership programs, community organizations, and population, rendering it in many ways a resource-rich region. However, because of a lack of communication and coordination, participants expressed a lack of clarity on the various leadership programs and how they compare to one another. Additionally, it was mentioned that there can be a lack of trust between leaders, often influenced by a perception that some individuals are driven by personal gain as opposed to community needs. Increasing the connection and trust between related groups is a challenge that, if solved, would benefit the ecosystem as a whole.





# Mountain Region

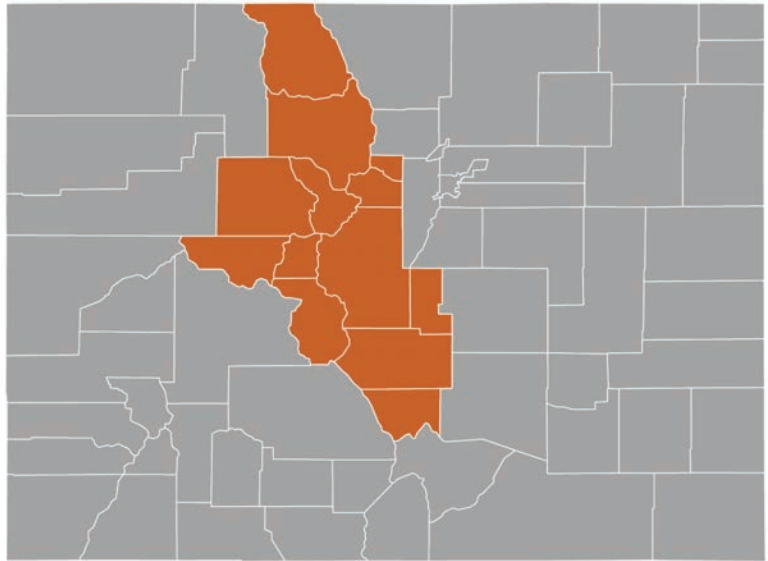


**22 PEOPLE**



**9 COUNTIES**

Grand, Eagle, Summit, Pitkin,  
Lake, Park, Chaffee, Teller,  
and Fremont.



## Assets

### Local organizations

Communities in the Mountain Region are home to many organizations that assist leaders in a variety of ways. These organizations provide much needed support for both informal community leaders and formal leaders. Some of the organizations mentioned were The Literacy Project, Lake County Build a Generation, Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI), Colorado Association of Ski Towns, and The Aspen Institute.

### Funders

Statewide philanthropic organizations have played key roles in bringing mountain communities together. Because they bring resources and provide a specific reason to connect, more communities are willing to come to the table for the benefit of the region when a funder is involved. Stakeholders said they were connected to the rest of the state by funders including Colorado Trust, Philanthropy Colorado, and Colorado Health Foundation. The Mountain Region is also home to several influential local foundations including the Aspen Community Foundation and the Vail Valley Foundation.

## Opportunities

### Connection and cohesion

With the advancement of technology and the mass adaptation of virtual connection because of the global coronavirus pandemic, new opportunities to connect on a regular basis are emerging. With significant geographic barriers between communities, videoconferencing provides opportunities for Mountain Region leaders to connect with leaders across the state, and specifically on the Front Range, without having to travel long distances. These connections can be used to deepen existing relationships, establish new relationships, build mentor relationships across communities, and drive measurable change through regional action plans.

### Leadership pipeline

Overall, the leadership pipeline is successful for traditional leaders; however, informal leaders, nontraditional leaders, and underrepresented leaders may find it difficult to enter the pipeline. A system designed to build the skills and networks of new leaders would create confidence and support both individuals and organizations in developing the trust needed to integrate and elevate new voices without traditional experience.

“How do we remove barriers for community members who are informal leaders to move into more formal leadership roles?”

## Challenges

### Diversification of leadership

Participants shared the need for diverse voices in leadership roles. To represent their community and support the region, the vision and voice of community leaders must be more inclusive. Because of the tourism economy and resort industry, many mountain towns experience significant economic disparity. There are many community members who work in tourism and can barely make ends meet. These individuals, who focus group participants shared are often Latino immigrants and residents, are incredibly involved in their families and neighborhoods but are rarely integrated into the town leadership structure. This divide results in community leadership that fails to represent the community in its entirety. Clear avenues for leaders from diverse backgrounds to become part of the formal leadership system will help cultivate and expand community representation.

“How are we helping to educate, cultivate curiosity within our communities about leadership so that our vulnerable and underserved populations can build leadership skills?”



## Connection and cohesion

Connecting with leaders in other communities is another obstacle the Mountain Region faces. Whether connecting with neighboring communities, counties, or statewide, the physical barriers that isolate this region make it challenging to develop strong, ongoing relationships. There are some strong sector or industry connections, but there are few links across industry lines. Additionally, connections with statewide groups and agencies seem to be project based and short term. Participants are unsure what leadership programs exist, and the process of finding a program that is a fit can feel overwhelming for leaders in rural communities.

## Leadership pipeline

Organizations or community projects often look to established leaders with known experience and expertise to take on additional leadership roles without considering less experienced leaders or new community members. This creates a gap in the leadership pipeline, as new leaders are not entering into leadership roles at a high enough frequency to replace leaders as they age-out of their roles. This lack of support around young leaders' development, either through formal training or experience, creates limitations on the voices represented.

# Southern Region

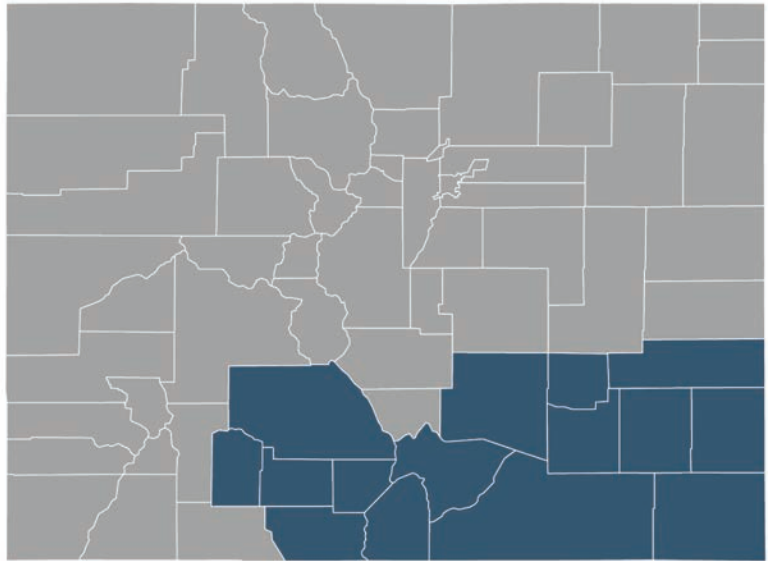


**17 PEOPLE**



**10 COUNTIES**

Alamosa, Bent, Kiowa,  
Las Animas, Mineral,  
Otero, and Pueblo.



## Assets

### Educational networks and institutions

Similar to the Eastern Region, one of the strongest assets of the Southern Region is the leadership opportunities that are part of the K-12 schools' extracurricular options or are programs geared specifically toward youth, including 4-H, FFA, and FBLA. More specifically within education leadership, the importance of the education-based associations and leadership connections were highlighted. Mentioned were school districts, Adams State University, Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), CSU-Pueblo, and Pueblo Community College.

### Local government

The Southern Region is made up of many rural towns, which tend to run a larger number of their programs and community opportunities through their respective local governments. Because of this, the county and town leaders make up a large portion of the overall leadership for communities.

### Local organizations

The southern region boasted several organizations which support local communities. Leadership Pueblo and the President's Leadership Program at Otero Junior College were noted as important

programs for the area. However, for those who represented communities outside of Pueblo and La Junta, it was shared that access to local programs for leadership development was not readily available and most leaders have no choice but to make the hours-long trip to Pueblo or the Front Range to participate. The following organizations were mentioned as supporting leaders in the area: Latino Chamber, Pueblo Chamber, Mineral Chamber, Alamosa Chamber & Economic Development Council.

## Funders

Statewide funders, or organizations who act like funders in the region, are important as they bring much needed resources in the form of grants, human capital, and leadership development opportunities. Those mentioned by stakeholders include Colorado Creative Industries, Rotary groups, CRC's Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD), National Civic League, Colorado Rural Health Center, Orton Family Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation, and the Emerging Leaders Development program at El Pomar Foundation.

## Opportunities

### People

A common theme in the Southern Region was the value people found from working with other leaders from the region. While few formal leaders exist, community champions care deeply about local initiatives and take on many roles in order to find success. Therefore, creating a mentor program where people could meet and collaborate with peers based on roles, goals, and regional issues could provide leaders the support they need.

### Connection and cohesion

Community representatives expressed interest in meeting other Southern Colorado leaders to learn about other communities and develop relationships with local leaders. Most noted they would use local connections to brainstorm ideas and learn about similar communities' solutions to similar challenges. Having a group to collaborate with and explore different leadership styles, starting locally and then growing to become statewide, could help create a leadership ecosystem in the state of Colorado.

## Challenges

### Barriers to access

Overall, there is a lack of leadership programs for adults in Southern Colorado. The opportunities available for leadership are segmented based on sectors, with little of the necessary cross-sector collaboration available. Having more integrated opportunities would be particularly useful to the people and leaders who seek to make a difference.

When there are programs available, there is often a lack of resources, either time or financial, for informal leaders or leaders of small organizations to attend. It was shared that community leaders are often focused on trying to put food on the table or are working so many jobs that they cannot afford to leave for a day to go to a leadership conference on the Front Range or participate in a formal multi-day leadership development program.

## “How do they get the confidence & resources to participate in these leadership opportunities?”

### Lack of financial resources

Participants in the Southern Colorado focus group spoke to the economic challenges faced by the region and the impact on leaders and leadership development. With high rates of poverty and access to fewer financial resources than other Colorado communities, Southern Colorado leaders are often focused on meeting basic needs of residents and do not have the financial resources to invest in leadership development. These observations are supported by data collected for the KIDS COUNT in Colorado!, a publication sponsored by the Colorado Children’s Campaign. In 2018, the five counties with the highest rates of child poverty were all in Southern Colorado. With the exception of Pueblo county, all Southern Colorado counties had a median household income of \$31,557 to \$44,704, compared to the state median income of \$71,949.

### Diversification of leadership

Community members, particularly those from smaller communities, shared there is a stagnation in ideas at the leadership level because no new voices are joining the conversation. This lack of new ideas creates a closed mindset within the community, making it harder to develop and embrace new ways of thinking. Furthermore, whether because of a lack of options or a lack of understanding of how to be involved, only a few community members take on all the community leadership roles, which can lead to feelings of being overworked and burned out.

### Leadership pipeline

Young people leave the community and often do not return to the Southern Region. For the few who do come back to their hometowns, and the young adults who move to the area, there are few opportunities open to them. As most opportunities are not publicly posted or shared, they must be a part of the local network to hear about leadership opportunities. When a leadership role is identified, young people often have no support or formal training to enable them to be successful in leadership positions.



# Western Region

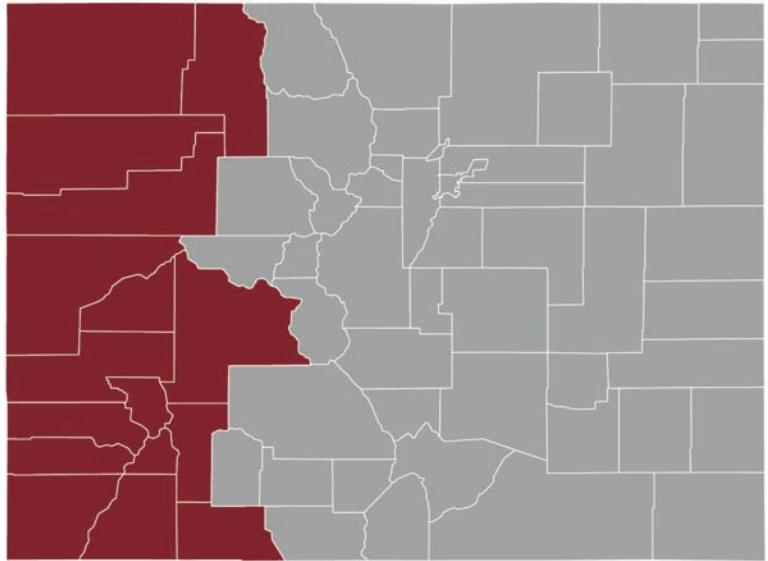


**32 PEOPLE**



**10 COUNTIES**

Delta, Garfield, La Plata, Mesa, Moffat, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Routt, and San Miguel.



## Assets

### Funders

Numerous foundations play an important role in the prosperity of Western Colorado. They have contributed to the economic development of the area and are known for their work bringing communities together around specific topics or focus areas. Local foundations and community foundations including the Telluride Foundation and the Yampa Valley Community Foundation serve as important local institutions, and several statewide funders including Gates Family Foundation were noted as important players.

### People

Through their leadership, the people who live and work on the Western Slope make the communities thrive. The people are passionate, multi-talented, and committed to the communities in which they live and work.

### Local organizations

In this region, there are leadership development programs and opportunities for community members, and some of the large corporations have their own leadership programs for internal development. These programs and opportunities allow leaders at all levels and across sectors to

develop their skills and gain new experiences without the resource burden of traveling to the Front Range. Some of the organizations mentioned were local community foundations, Outward Bound, Mountain Voices Project, Hispanic Affairs Project, Leadership Steamboat, Western Association of Chambers, One Valley Prosperity Project in Gunnison, and Grand Junction Cleantech Business Coalition.

## Statewide organizations

The Western Slope utilizes connections across the state to help support leaders and community champions in the region. These organizations include statewide funders, leadership programs, and industry-specific associations and organizations. Partners mentioned included CiviCO, Club 20, Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Economic Development Corporation of Colorado (EDCC), Colorado Municipal League, Colorado Creative Industries (CCI), and El Pomar Foundation Regional Councils.

## Opportunities

### Connection and cohesion

Working more closely with leaders on the Western Slope, as well as those across the state, provides the opportunity to learn about new tools, ideas, and best practices. Gaining insight into how other communities adapt to challenges (such as the COVID-19 outbreak) provides opportunities for economic development. Whether it is done through mentorships, cohort-based programs, or stronger relationships in general, being able to rely on other communities for resources and support would benefit the overall leadership ecosystem.



**“The Western slope is a vast region with many needs - and there is great human capital dedicated to the region. We need to figure out how to better connect, learn & develop.”**

### Shared focus

Some participants emphasized that leaders who come together around a shared focus can inspire bigger thinking, foster collective wellness, enhance engagement (with cross-sector, underrepresented leaders, and leaders without formal titles), and prevent the duplication of efforts. However, in creating and maintaining shared purposes, there is often the need for connected financial incentives in order to ensure collaboration is prioritized.

Participants also noted the importance of having a horizontal state-level focus and vertical local focus. This broad, statewide focus would help a leadership ecosystem increase connectivity across Colorado, while the vertical focus on a local level would provide community-level results.



## Challenges

### Barriers to access

The complexity of community leaders coming together in the large, mountainous area that is the Western Slope is a challenge. This makes it difficult to develop new connections across sectors and across the region. The geographic barriers also make it hard for the Western Slope to engage with other communities. This creates a lack of awareness of other regions and often leads to a siloed mindset within communities. The geographic barriers can also contribute to slow and unreliable internet connections, limiting the residents' ability to connect virtually.

### Diversification of leadership

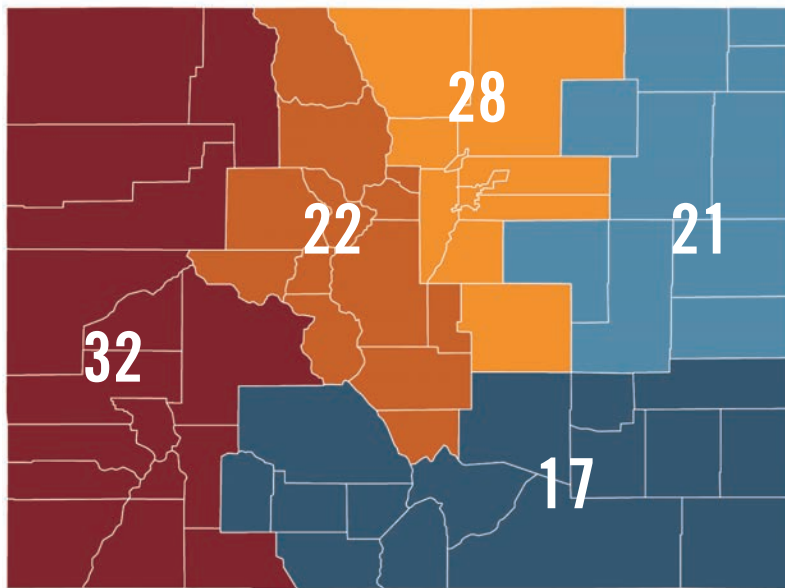
There are a handful of organizations and well-known leaders in the Western Region that are heavily involved in leadership projects. However, people outside of this group are not as involved as they should be to represent the region's communities. There are untapped leaders, specifically those from minority and nontraditional groups, who do not receive or participate in the opportunity to collaborate on initiatives. Furthermore, the established, frequently-called-upon leaders often hold roles in local governments, which, in some community members' opinion, creates an over-reliance on small, local governments.

### Connection and cohesion

Because leaders and community champions find it difficult to come together, dissemination of information must be clear and simple. However, the flow of information about opportunities in the region is too complex to monitor on an individual basis.



# APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES & REPRESENTED ORGANIZATIONS



\*\* Numbers represent attendees in each region

## Attendees

Mohamed Abdelrahman  
 Timothy Alvarez  
 JJ Ament  
 Mark Andersen  
 Clark Anderson  
 Carrie Andrew  
 Cindy Aubrey  
 Ann Ayers  
 Katie Baldassar  
 Betsy Barnett  
 William Bell  
 Christine Benero  
 Luis Benitez

Jeanne Bistranin  
 Lora Bledsoe  
 Leah Bornstein  
 Lynn Borup  
 Melanie Bravo  
 Kelly Brough  
 Robin Brown  
 Carrie Buchan  
 Bernie Buescher  
 Gary Butterworth  
 Barbara Bynum  
 Tony Caligiuri  
 Ray Caraway  
 Matt Carpenter  
 Alex Carter

Chris Castilian  
 Kathy Cefus  
 John Chapdelaine  
 Cile Chavez  
 Lance Cheslock  
 Chris Chopyak  
 David Chrislip  
 Kyle Christensen  
 John Clark  
 Iris Clark  
 Gruffie Clough  
 Will Cook  
 Clay Cousins  
 Susie Davis  
 Cari Davis

Kate Deeny  
James Depue  
John DiAntonio  
Leonard Dinegar  
Christy Doon  
Tami Door  
Cara Doyle  
Cindy Dozier  
Dana Duran  
Cory Edwards  
Jake Eichengreen  
Jasmine Elizabeth  
Patricia Erjavec  
TeRay Esquibel  
Maria Fabula  
Renny Fagan  
Ella Fahrlander  
Shanna Farmer  
Carlos Fernandez  
Alan Fletcher  
Tim Foster  
Sarah Franke  
Bill Fulton  
Rocco Fuschetto  
Israel García-Humes  
Russell George  
Sammie George  
Tommy George  
Matt Gianneschi  
Caryn Gibson  
Lori Gilliland-Haukeness  
Rebecca Gorrell  
Colleen Gray  
Rose Green  
Bryan Hannegan  
Carrie Hauser  
Trisha Herman  
Eric Hopfenbeck  
Ann Hutchison  
Kyle Hybl  
Mike Imhoff  
Leanne Jeffers

Pam Jensen  
Sarah Johnson  
Amy Johnson  
Myles Johnson  
Kenzo Kawanabe  
Kathy Kennedy  
Tom Kenning  
Denise King  
Jesse King  
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## Organizations

Adams State University  
Aims Community College  
Alpine Bank  
Aspen Community Foundation  
Aspen Institute  
Aspen Music Festival and School  
Aurora Public Schools  
Baby Bear Hugs  
Bent County Development Foundation  
Bledsoe Mobile Vet  
Blue Canyon Technologies  
Bohemian Foundation  
Boys and Girls Club of Northwest Colorado  
Chaffee County Community Foundation  
Children's Hospital Colorado  
City of Montrose  
City of Salida  
City of Wray  
Civic Canopy  
CiviCO  
Cloud City Conservation Center  
Club 20  
Colorado Chamber of Commerce  
Colorado Education Initiative  
Colorado Healing Fund  
Colorado Health Foundation  
Colorado Mesa University  
Colorado Mountain College  
Colorado Nonprofit Association  
Colorado Open Lands  
Colorado Springs Health Foundation  
Colorado State University  
Colorado State University Extension  
Colorado State University Northeastern Regional  
Engagement Center  
Colorado State University - Pueblo  
Colorado Women's College  
Community Builders  
Community Partnership Family Resource Center  
Community Resource Center  
Craig-Scheckman Family Foundation  
Creede Repertory Theater  
Delta County School District  
Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce  
Denver Metro Chamber Leadership Foundation  
Douglas County Community Foundation  
Douglas County School District  
Downtown Denver Partnership  
Eagle Valley Community Foundation  
EastCo Group  
Eastern Colorado Community Fund  
El Pomar Foundation  
Elevate Momentum  
Ernest and Lillian E. Campbell Foundation  
Family Leadership Training Institute  
Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce  
Fort Lewis College  
Fremont County RE-1 School District  
Grand Foundation  
Grand Junction Economic Partnership  
Great Outdoors Colorado  
Greater Arkansas River Nature Association  
Gruffie Clough and Associates  
Heartland Center for Leadership Development  
Holy Cross Energy  
Idalia School District  
Ignacio School District  
JERA Partnerships  
Kids at Their Best  
Kiowa County Independent  
Kitzmiller-Bales Trust  
La Junta Economic Development & Urban Renewal  
La Puente  
Lake County Build a Generation  
Latino Community Foundation of Colorado  
Latino Leadership Institute  
Lone Cone Library  
Manaus  
Metro Denver Economic Development Corp.  
Mile High United Way

Montezuma Cortez School District  
Montrose Community Foundation  
Morgan Community College  
Morgan County  
Mosquito Range Heritage Initiative  
Mt. San Rafael Hospital  
Northern Colorado Community Foundation  
Otero Junior College  
PEBC  
Philanthropy Colorado  
Phillips County  
Phillips County Economic Development  
Picture Your Strategy  
Pikes Peak Community Foundation  
Pikes Peak United Way  
Pueblo Community College  
Pueblo County United Way  
QUAD Partnership  
Range Ventures  
Regional Institute for Health and Environmental  
Leadership  
Roaring Fork Leadership  
Roaring Fork School District RE-1  
Rocky Mountain Leadership Program  
RootEd  
Skillful Means  
Southern Colorado Small Business Development  
Center

State of Colorado, Governor's Office  
Steamboat Springs Chamber  
SVP Boulder County  
Telluride Foundation  
The Denver Foundation  
The Literacy Project  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Summit Foundation  
Town of Durango  
Town of Hayden  
Town of Hugo  
Town of Montrose  
Town of Parachute  
Town of Ridgeway  
Tri-County Health  
Trinidad Mayor  
United Way Weld County  
University of Colorado  
University of Colorado Colorado Springs  
University of Colorado Denver  
Urban Leadership Foundation of Colorado  
Vail Medical Center  
Vail Valley Foundation  
Vail Valley Partnership  
VF Corporation  
Western Colorado Community Foundation  
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