



NORTHWEST COLORADO



INNOVATION CENTER

northwestcolorado.org

CATALYST FOR GROWTH

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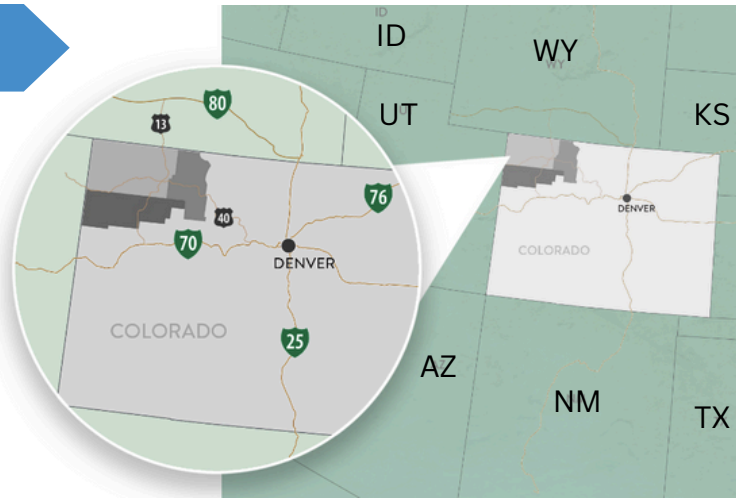
CASE FOR SUPPORT

The Challenge and Opportunity

Northwest Colorado faces a defining moment. Generations of families built livelihoods around coal mines, but our rural communities now face massive job loss and economic uncertainty with the sunseting of coal. The closure of four coal mines and coal-fired furnaces at two power plants in Northwest Colorado jeopardizes nearly 2,800 coal-related jobs and 22% of the regional gross domestic product. This economic decline also means a loss of millions in tax revenue that funds schools, hospitals, public safety, and other essential services.

Faced with this generational transformation, a community-led transition plan was developed that would meet the multi-dimensional needs of coal-impacted communities in Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties in Northwest Colorado. The plan supports five key pillars:

- Economic Diversification
- Workforce Development
- Affordable Housing
- Access to Child Care
- Regional Transportation



A key initiative of the plan was to establish a rural hub, inspired by the Aspen Institute's [Rural Hub Model](#). The Northwest Colorado Innovation Center emphasizes economic diversification by nurturing the following sectors:

- Renewable Energy
- Value-added Agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Aviation/Aerospace
- Health Care
- Business Services and Technology
- Outdoor and Cultural Heritage Tourism
- Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

Vision: Northwest Colorado Innovation Center

The concept for the Northwest Colorado Innovation Center (NCIC) emerged from nearly two years of research, community engagement, and consensus-building with stakeholders from the three counties. Their collection vision gave birth to NCIC, a 501(c)(3) established in 2024, that will serve as the region's anchor for entrepreneurship, small business, economic, community, and workforce development, and regional collaboration.

The NCIC will serve as a one-stop shop in Craig, Colorado – the epicenter of the coal transition. It will be the hub in an incubator network that provides entrepreneurial support, business consulting, workforce training, access to capital, and other co-located services. Rather than duplicating existing efforts, the Center will colocate with other resource partners – maximizing collaboration and streamlining delivery of services to coal transition workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs.

Building Blocks Already in Motion

Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E)

The NCIC BR&E Program provides in-person business consulting and conducts business visits to support business starts and expansion or prevent closures with a focus on Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties, where there is a gap in these services. This program ensures rural companies overcome barriers like capital access, market shifts, and workforce shortages. A survey of coal transition workers indicates that 33% would like to start a business and want business coaching.

Metrics:

- 46 projects are currently in the BR&E pipeline, representing 480 jobs.
- Goals over the next two years are to create 150 direct jobs, \$154 million in economic activity, and \$8.3 million in new tax revenue by:
 - Launching 10 new startups
 - Expanding 40 existing small businesses

Workforce Training Program

NCIC is designing a workforce development program to train, upskill, or reskill a multi-generational workforce from high school students to coal transition workers, offering industry-recognized certifications and stackable microcredentials in partnership with workforce partners, colleges, and employers.

Metrics: Upskill or reskill 250 workers in three years and create two new apprenticeships

Business Attraction Program

NCIC will market Northwest Colorado as a competitive location for new employers. Activities include maintaining a regional website, digital campaigns, and responding to site selector RFPs. New business attraction diversifies the economy, increases the tax base, and creates new jobs.

Metrics: Target of 200 average monthly website visitors

Microlending Revolving Loan Fund (RLF)

The Northwest Catalyst Capital is a microlending revolving loan fund that will provide \$5,000 to \$15,000 low-interest loans for entrepreneurs and small businesses lacking access to traditional financing. Limited access to capital is one of the primary barriers to starting and growing businesses, and BIPOC and women-owned businesses have greater challenges in obtaining financing. Additionally, borrowers will receive business training to improve outcomes and minimize defaults.

Metrics: 32 loans in two years

Business Incubator Network

Using a “hub and spoke” model, the Innovation Center in Craig will link incubators in other coal-impacted communities to share programming and financial support to meet people where they are. The incubator network will support startups with space, business coaching, and access to capital across the three counties.

Metrics: Provide programming and fundraising to incubator “spokes” in Hayden, Meeker, and Rangely in the next two years.

Community Development & Regional Facilitation

NCIC strengthens the region by supporting place-based investments in major infrastructure and economic development projects. This includes grant writing, program management, and regional facilitation to coordinate joint action and policymaking, and convening stakeholders across sectors to align coordinated action.

Metrics:

- Monthly NWCDC and NCIC Board and Committee Meetings
- 45+ grants supported (over \$27M requested)
- Annual Meetings to sustain regional partnerships

Why Your Investment Matters

The Northwest Colorado Innovation Center represents more than a building—it is a regional lifeline. By supporting this initiative, you will:

- Prevent long-standing poverty from taking root in a coal-impacted region
- Help workers transition into stable, well-paying careers and stay in their communities, and prevent the outmigration from rural Northwest Colorado
- Provide entrepreneurs and small businesses with the resources they need to succeed and create new jobs
- Attract new employers to invest in our region to diversify the economy
- Stimulate job creation and tax replacement
- Address community priorities such as housing, childcare, and transportation
- Strengthen the entire region's resilience for decades to come

Our Funding Needs

Capital Campaign: NCIC is currently fundraising a local match to help leverage federal and philanthropic grants for a \$1.6 million project budget that funds the acquisition and remodel of a 14,000 square-foot, vacant state education building to serve as the home for the Northwest Colorado Innovation Center. This building will house all our programming and represent a one-stop shop for economic, workforce, and community development.

Programming: With a program budget of \$500,000, Northwest Colorado Innovation Center will have a transformative impact on families and businesses across the region. In two years, NCIC will help launch 10 new businesses, expand 40 existing ones, train 20 displaced coal workers, and issue 32 microloans — creating nearly 150 direct jobs, \$154 million in economic activity, and \$8.3 million in new tax revenue. Over three years, this investment scales to 350 new direct jobs, 250 coal miners retrained, and nearly \$20 million in tax revenue, positioning Northwest Colorado as a national model for rural economic resilience.

Donor Benefits

As a 501c3 designated as an Enterprise Zone Contribution project, 25% of your tax-deductible donation can also be claimed as a State of Colorado income tax credit up to \$100,000 per taxpayer per tax year.

Join Us

We invite you to partner with us in shaping the future of Northwest Colorado based on a sustainable economy. Please review the investment levels below and consider joining us to transform today's challenges into tomorrow's opportunities.

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Investment Levels

