

**Economic Development Conference for the EDA Denver Region  
April 15 – 17, 2025  
Denver, CO**

**Tuesday, April 15, 2025**

**8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.**                      **Conference Registration & Information Desk**                      *Capitol Foyer*

**9:00 – 10:00 a.m.**                      **Opening Plenary**                      *Capitol 4-7*

**Building Livable Communities: The Power of Place, People, & Relationships**

“At the most basic level, community is relationships.” This mantra is core to the work of Clark Anderson, the Executive Director of Community Builders, a Colorado-based non-profit which supports communities across the West. Join this conference kickoff plenary for an inspiring journey on building loveable and livable communities; managing change and growth; community engagement and bringing different voices together; and empowering local action. Clark Anderson has spent the last 15 years dedicated to helping communities address these complex issues.

- *Clark Anderson, Executive Director, Community Builders*
- *Laura Lewis Marchino, Executive Director, Region 9 Economic Development District*

**10:00 – 10:15 a.m.**                      **Networking Break**                      *Capitol Foyer*

**10:15 – 11:45 a.m.**                      **Concurrent Sessions**  
**Best Practices in Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Management**                      *Capitol 1*

During this session, attendees will learn from Grow America’s experts on general information about RLFs, specifics about EDA’s RLF program, and tips and best practices to maximize your RLF dollars.

- *Antonia Stinnett, Program Manager, Grow America*
- *Mary Louk, Director of Credit, Grow America*

**Attracting and Retaining Business and Talent in Rural Communities**                      *Capitol 2*

In today’s competitive landscape, rural communities must adopt innovative strategies to attract and retain businesses and skilled, talent residents—fostering long-term economic growth. National economic development thought leader Erik Pages will lead attendees through promising practices for talent retention, community and partnership engagement, and strengthening the small business and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- *Erik Pages, President, EntreWorks Consulting*

**Rural Economic Development and Housing**                      *Mineral Hall B-C*

A strong housing stock is at the heart of a thriving and resilient economy. However, the rising cost of housing has become a major challenge, acting as a significant drag on rural economies across the country. Economic Development Districts (EDDs) and other EDA stakeholders are leveraging their roles as planners, conveners, and advocates to strengthen housing policies and promote sustainable solutions and help shape policies that support housing affordability, economic growth, and community well-being. Join representatives from EDDs in the Denver Region to explore innovative and actionable housing strategies.

- *Rachel Tuyn, EDD Director, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments*
- *Chris Allread, Housing Program Manager, Southeastern Regional Development Agency*
- *Moderator: Joe D’Antonio, Program Manager, NADO*

**Conversation Café: AI and Economic Development**                      *Capitol 3*

## **Working Agenda | April 14, 2025**

Artificial intelligence is likely to reshape both regional economies and the practice of economic development, from workforce automation to predictive analytics and business attraction, to grant writing and staff productivity. This conversation cafe will allow attendees to explore how AI is driving economic shifts, the challenges and opportunities it presents for economic development practitioners, and real-world examples of its impact. Join us for an interactive conversation on what AI means for the future of regions and how economic developers can navigate this evolving landscape.

### **12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Plenary Lunch**

#### **Collaborations & Capacity Across the EDA Spectrum**

*Capitol 4-7*

The Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) program, supported by the U.S. EDA, was launched in 2023 and has since placed 65 fellows across distressed communities to advance transformative economic development projects and develop a pipeline of next generation leaders in economic development. Two ERC fellows working in the EDA Denver Region will showcase their efforts and experiences providing needed capacity, working in collaboration across multiple EDA stakeholders, and developing new skills and connections.

- *Sasha Nelson, Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) Fellow, Northwest Colorado Development Council*
- *Alexandra Calloway-Nation, Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) Fellow, Wind River Development Fund*

### **1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Mobile Workshop**

*Hotel Lobby*

**National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL):** Established in 1977, [NREL](#) is the U.S. Department of Energy's only national research lab solely dedicated to securing America's energy future through renewable energy and energy efficiency. Through cutting-edge facilities and world-class research staff, NREL helps power the future through energy innovations which have created jobs, boosted economic growth, and strengthened energy security. NREL also provides technical assistance to communities of all sizes to help solve energy challenges and implement innovative solutions. ***Pre-registration and \$40 additional fee required; limited to 20 attendees.***

### **1:15 – 2:45 p.m. Concurrent Sessions**

#### **A Closer Look at the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

*Mineral Hall B-C*

This session will provide an overview of the latest trends and best practices for creating and implementing effective CEDS, ensuring they serve as valuable roadmaps for economic development and resilience. It will also include case studies in CEDS development and implementation at the regional and state level. Whether you are new to developing a new CEDS or looking for a refresher, this session aims to provide timely guidance and information to enhance your economic development planning efforts.

- *Stefan Herron, Strategy & Policy Analyst – Strategy & Performance Division, Missouri Department of Economic Development*
- *Karol Patterson, Economic Development Specialist, Mountainland Association of Governments*
- *Brett Schwartz, Associate Director, NADO*

#### **EDA Defederalized Funds 101**

*Capitol 1*

During this session, subject matter experts will share information about EDA's defederalized funds - including background on the RLF Act, requirements to defederalize, and the defederalization process. Attendees will also hear innovative practices, insights, experiences for using these funds.

- *Antonia Stinnett, Program Manager, Grow America*
- *Mary Louk, Director of Credit, Grow America*
- *Brendan Cosgrove, Co-founder & Director, Catalyze*

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### **Building Tech Economies in Rural America: Strategies for Success**

*Capitol 2*

Automation is reshaping rural economies, leading to job and population loss. To reverse this trend, rural communities are building tech-driven economies that create high-wage jobs, support entrepreneurs, and foster economic resilience. The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) has developed a proven, data-driven model to help rural leaders build sustainable tech ecosystems. This workshop will explore key strategies for rural tech-based economic development and feature case studies from Norfolk, NE, Seward, NE, and Kirksville, MO. Participants will gain actionable insights and resources to drive innovation in their communities. CORI has helped rural communities secure over \$29.9M in federal and matching funds through the EDA's Build to Scale Challenge Grant. In 2024, CORI supported more than \$23 million in B2S project applications.

- *Trish Thibodo, Head of Federal Grants Support, Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)*

### **Conversation Café: Building and Managing a Successful EDD**

*Capitol 3*

Join fellow EDD staff for an open and candid conversation about the realities of managing organizations in today's ever-evolving landscape. Topics will be decided by attendees and may include navigating organizational growth, addressing staffing and funding challenges, and implementing innovative solutions to strengthen impact. Come ready to share your experiences, ask questions, and connect with fellow executives in a solutions-focused conversation!

**2:45 – 3:00 p.m.**

**Networking Break**

*Capitol Foyer*

**3:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions**

### **Building Connections between EDDs and State Economic Development Agencies**

*Capitol 1*

States and regions are increasingly recognizing the value and importance of fostering strategic alignment among economic development initiatives. The push for such alignment stems from a growing understanding that when long-term strategies across various levels of government and organizations are harmonized, the benefits are multifaceted and substantial. Join this session for an overview of the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) *Policy Academy*, which was launched through the support of the U.S. EDA to improve alignment between state economic development agencies, EDDs, and local partners. Hear first-hand experiences, lessons learned and suggested best practices moving forward from both *Policy Academy* technical assistance leads and team participants.

- *Erik Pages, President, EntreWorks Consulting*
- *Matt Godinez, Assistant Secretary, Kansas Department of Commerce*

### **Building Healthy Economies through Local and Regional Food Systems**

*Mineral Hall B-C*

- This session will explore how strengthening local and regional food systems can drive economic growth, support small and mid-sized food and farm businesses, and build more resilient rural economies. Speakers will highlight examples from Colorado and beyond, showcasing cross-sector partnerships, innovative funding models, and strategies to increase market access for producers. Topics will include best practices from food start-up collaborations, state and federal funding initiatives, and trends in food business development. The discussion will also cover national efforts to coordinate food system investments and technical assistance. Attendees will gain insights into how regional collaboration is shaping the future of food systems across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states.
- *Dawn Thilmany, CSU Dept of Ag and Resource Economics, Local Food Economics Community of Practice, USDA Regional Food Business Centers*
- *Brian Coppom, Colorado Dept of Agriculture*
- *Libby Christensen, CO Food Systems and Food Business Center lead*
- *Michael Gabel, CSU SPUR Food Innovation Center*

## **Working Agenda | April 14, 2025**

### **Conversation Café: De-mystifying Match Requirements**

*Capitol 3*

*Navigating the complexities of matching requirements can be a daunting challenge. This Conversation Café provides a unique opportunity for members to come together to share their experiences, ask questions, and learn from one another. Through open dialogue, we aim to identify practical strategies for managing matching requirements and ensuring collective success.*

**5:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

#### **Reception**

*Capitol Foyer*

Continue the conversations and catching up with your peers before heading to dinner. Light snacks and beverages will be served.

## **Wednesday, April 16, 2025**

**7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

#### **Conference Registration & Information Desk**

*Capitol Foyer*

**7:30 – 8:30 a.m.**

#### **Breakfast Buffet**

*Capitol 4-7*

During this casual breakfast buffet, you will have time to connect with your peers from across the region to share ideas and exchange information.

**8:30 – 9:15 a.m.**

#### **Morning Plenary**

*Capitol 4-7*

### **Welcome to the Future! The Digital Technology Impact on Economic and Workforce Development**

Welcome to the “4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution”. Digital technologies—such as AI and Virtual Reality (VR) —are increasingly impacting not only our daily lives and activities, but also our economies, our workforce, and how we develop our future workforce pipeline. Learn more from two innovative programs in the EDA Denver region that are helping jumpstart a transformation in economic and workforce development to meet the demand and jobs of the future.

- *Mark Yoss, Director, Advanced Manufacturing Sciences Institute, Metropolitan State University (MSU) of Denver*
- *Joe Runge, Associate Director, UNeTEch Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center*

**9:15- 9:45 a.m.**

#### **Networking Break**

*Capitol Foyer*

**9:30-11:30am**

#### **Mobile Workshops**

*Hotel Lobby*

**Mi Casa Resource Center:** With over 48 years of dedicated service, [Mi Casa Resource Center](#) is committed to advancing the economic prosperity of the Latino community across the Denver region. Mi Casa strives to educate, train, and support youth and adults toward economic success, while fostering positive community change. Mi Casa is serving as a regional lead in implementing the \$11.4 million Good Jobs Challenge project awarded by EDA in 2022 to support workforce solutions for the business community and vulnerable jobseekers in Denver. ***Pre-registration and \$40 additional fee required; limited to 30 attendees.***

**MSU Denver Advanced Manufacturing Sciences Institute:** Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution! It is a new day for manufacturing in Colorado and across the nation, as digital technology (such as AI) is transforming manufacturing by making it leaner and smarter – and jump-starting an industrial revival. [Metropolitan State University of Denver’s University Center and Advanced Manufacturing Sciences Institute](#) are at the forefront of this revolution through skills training, research, and technical assistance. ***Pre-registration and \$40 additional fee required; limited to 45 attendees.***

**9:45 – 11:00 a.m.**

#### **Concurrent Sessions**

**OMB’s “Uniform Guidance”: What Program Managers Need to Know**

*Mineral Hall B-C*

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Not everyone who works for an organization that receives and expends federal grant funds needs to be an expert on the requirements that govern those transactions. But everybody who touches those federal grants that represent critically important financial resources needs to know enough to avoid common errors that have resulted in organizational misery for other recipients and subrecipients. This session will highlight the key policies that affect how grants can be spent—their mandates for sensible internal controls, allowable costs, supporting documentation, and accurate reporting—presented in layperson’s language.

- *Bob Lloyd, Principal, Lloyd Consulting Services*

### **Powering Resilient Economies in Energy Communities**

*Capitol 1*

Our nation’s coal communities and other traditionally energy-dominant economies have been planning for resilient futures and diversifying their economies for several years. Tune into this interactive session for a showcase and deep dive into ongoing efforts in energy regions to build off assets, spark new economic development, attract and retain residents, and tell their unique community stories to the world.

- *Jade Powell, Deputy Director, Southeastern Regional Development Agency, Utah*
- *Jim Atchison, Executive Director, Southeastern Montana Development Corporation*
- *Sasha Nelson, ERC Fellow, Northwest Colorado Development Council*

### **Engage, Explore, Execute: Interactive Wealth Creation Strategies for EDDs**

*Capitol 2*

Wealth creation is an approach to economic development that connects a region’s assets to market demand in ways that build rooted wealth for local people and places. Join us for an interactive session to learn more about how your organization can incorporate wealth creation principles and practices into its economic development work. This session will share ways to integrate wealth creation into your CEDS, into your engagement with your regional economic sectors, and into identifying possible market opportunities to support through value chain mapping.

Melissa Levy, Principal and Owner, Community Roots

**11:00 – 11:10 a.m.**

**Networking Break**

*Capitol Foyer*

**11:10 am – 12:15 p.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions**

### **Buying Goods and Services with Federal Grant Funds**

*Mineral Hall B-C, level 3*

When you look at the types of expenses covered in a federal grant budget, you might conclude that there are really three main categories—people, places for them to work, and assets they need to use. Travel, equipment, supplies, services, and even rent—should be acquired using procurement methods that reflect federal government standards contained the Office of Management and Budget’s “Uniform Guidance.” In between the implied advice to “shop around” and “get what you pay for” the standards impose requirements for soliciting offers, evaluating bids or proposals, and placing contracts with the correct clauses. This session will provide a practical overview of how to manage those administrative duties that are critical to the success of your federally funded projects.

- *Bob Lloyd, Principal, Lloyd Consulting Services*

### **Conversation Cafe: Building Partnerships across EDDs & Tribal Nations**

*Capitol 1*

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) and Tribal nations often serve overlapping geographies and share long-term goals around prosperity, resilience, and infrastructure. This conversation will explore ways to strengthen collaboration, improve communication, and align strategies that support both Tribal and regional priorities. Join us to share experiences, surface opportunities, and discuss practical steps toward stronger partnerships.

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### **A Trail Map for Growth: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Economies**

*Capitol 2*

Communities across the nation are leveraging their natural assets to build outdoor recreation economies. Tune into this session for a spotlight on outdoor recreation in North Dakota and strategic planning, partnerships, and investments in recreation and hospitality infrastructure to further develop an outdoor recreation economy. Attendees will hear from specific efforts facilitated by the Red River Regional Council to revitalize a major recreational asset in their region.

- *Cody Schulz, Director, North Dakota Parks & Recreation Department*
- *Dawn Mandt, Executive Director, Red River Regional Council, North Dakota*
- *Moderator: Jack Morgan, Associate Director, NADO*

**12:15 – 1:30pm**

**Lunch on Your Own**

**1:30 – 4:00pm**

**Mobile Workshop**

*Hotel Lobby*

**Colorado State University Spur Campus:** The [Colorado State University \(CSU\) Spur Campus](#) at Denver's National Western Center celebrates the proud tradition of Colorado agriculture, while 'spurring' innovative and global impact through community-centric, experiential, and lifelong learning opportunities. Research and programming at Spur promote agricultural literacy, foster agribusiness entrepreneurship, advance sustainability of rural and urban food systems, and enhance the health and well-being of communities. ***Pre-registration and additional fee required; limit to 25 attendees.***

**1:45 – 3:00pm**

**Concurrent Sessions**

**Rethinking Indirect Cost Recovery**

*Mineral Hall B-C*

Most federal grants include an Indirect Cost line item which allows grantees to include expenses that are not directly tied to a specific grant but are needed for the organization to operate such as rent and utilities. Grantees negotiate Indirect Cost Rates with a federal agency—typically one that provides the greatest amount of financial support. This session will encourage you to take a fresh look at the current federal policies for indirect cost recovery and determine how best to justify and support the approaches that you will use going forward in future negotiations with your cognizant agency.

- *Bob Lloyd, Principal, Lloyd Consulting Services*

**Philanthropy and EDA Stakeholders: Breaking Barriers and Building Relationships**

*Capitol 1*

Diversifying funding streams is top-of-mind for communities and organizations working in community and economic development. Partnerships with local, regional, and national philanthropic partners is one promising strategy to diversify funding sources, while building new partnerships to help strengthen capacity and assist with project implementation. In this panel, attendees will hear from philanthropic organizations and learn more about aligning project priorities and building lasting partnerships with these organizations.

- *Kelly Dunkin, President & CEO, Colorado Gives Foundation*
- *Claire Bouchard, Engagement Consultant, Northern Colorado Foundation*
- *Elicia Ratajczyk, Research Scientist and Network Facilitator, Institute for the Built environment, Colorado State University*
- *Moderator: Joe D'Antonio, Program Manager, NADO*

**Vision to Action: Strategic Planning Strategies for Your Organization**

*Capitol 2*

Planning and visioning are core to the roles of Economic Development Districts and other organizations working in community and economic development. These efforts are typically focused on communities they serve, through planning processes such as the CEDS. This session, however, will help start the discussion on strategic planning internally for your organization. Strategic plans can serve as an organization roadmap

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outlining missions, long-term goals, and resource allocation. Join this discussion to walk through approaches in strategic planning and share your experiences and/or challenges in organizational strategic planning.

- *Brian Kelsey, Manager, Economic Development Advisory Services, Ernst & Young LLP*

**3:00 – 3:15pm**

**Networking Break - Ice Cream Social**

*Capitol Foyer*

**3:15 – 4:30pm**

**Plenary Session**

*Capitol 4-7*

#### **Federal Legislative Update: Perspectives from the National and Regional Levels**

The change in the Administration will have implications for federal grant programs and services, including those managed by grantees across the EDA Denver Region. Attend this session to learn about the latest developments on Capitol Hill and in DC from both the national and regional perspectives.

- *Joe McKinney, Executive Director, NADO*
- *Rick Hunsaker, Executive Director, Region XII COG, and President, NADO*

### **Thursday, April 17, 2025**

**7:30 – 11:00 a.m.**

**Conference Registration & Information Desk**

*Capitol Foyer*

**7:30 – 8:30 a.m.**

**Good Conversations Breakfast Buffet**

*Capitol 4-7*

Back by popular demand! Enjoy breakfast with your peers as you discuss identified topics of interest from across the EDA-Denver region. Attendees will help offer topic ideas throughout the conference located on the whiteboard in the conference registration area.

**8:45 – 10:00 a.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Attracting, Retaining, & Nurturing EDD Staff**

*Capitol 1*

Despite budget and resource limitations, forward-thinking Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are finding innovative ways to recruit, develop, and retain top talent for the long term. This session will highlight real-world strategies that EDD leaders have successfully implemented to attract new talent, foster a positive workplace culture, and build a strong sense of belonging among staff. You will hear about employee benefits and opportunities, flexible work arrangements, office amenities, and much more.

- *Geri Gamber, Executive Director, South Eastern Regional Development Agency*
- *Rachelle Howe, Executive Director, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission*
- *Lynne Keller Forbes, Executive Director, South Eastern Council of Governments*
- *Moderator: Brett Schwartz, Associate Director, NADO*

#### **Technology-driven Solutions for Resilience & Economic Development**

*Capitol 2*

In an era of rapid technological transformations, regions are seeking to adapt and utilize tech-driven solutions to spark new job growth, diversify economies, and solve community resilience challenges, such as wildfire mitigation, water management, and energy transition. This session will showcase innovative research, storytelling, and partnerships for connecting resilience and economic development, including the National Science Foundation-funded Colorado-Wyoming Resilience Engine and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

- *Alan Rudolph, Chief Technology Officer, Colorado-Wyoming Resilience Engine, Innosphere Ventures*
- *Brad Clark, Senior Advisor, Mana Group Consulting*
- *James McCall, Energy & Environment Analyst, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL)*

#### **University Partnerships to Promote Collaborative Economic Development**

*Capitol 3*

Class is in session! Has your community or EDD taken advantage of local or regional institutions of higher education for economic and workforce development projects? Join this session to learn from a range of

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university partners showcasing their innovative programs and essential partnerships operating at the higher education level, but with valuable impact outside of campus and across their respective regions and states.

- *Rachel Munday, Executive Director, efactory, Missouri State University*
- *Melynda Thorpe, Assistant Vice President, Workforce & Educational Opportunity, Southern Utah University*
- *Jeffrey Tucker, Executive Director, Technology Development Institute, Kansas State University*
- *Joe Runge, Associate Director, UNeTEch Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center*

**10:00 – 10:15 a.m.**

**Networking Break**

*Capitol Foyer*

**10:15 – 11:15 a.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions**

### **The Geographic Approach to Regional Economic Development**

*Capitol 1*

Housing capacity and affordability, workforce development, and economic mobility are critical pillars of economic development, yet their scarcity or absence pose significant challenges for local and regional growth. This session explores how these factors impact economic initiatives, from limiting workforce accessibility to hindering business recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts. When workers cannot afford to live near their jobs, communities face diminished quality of life. Attendees will gain insights into how GIS is being used to address these shortages by modernizing housing and development policies and implementing economic mobility initiatives to achieve sustained economic growth.

- *Keith Cooke, Director of Planning and Community Development Markets, Esri*

### **All Safety is Local: Connections between Economic Development and Safe Mobility in Rural Communities**

*Capitol 2*

Concepts like ‘complete streets’ aim to make public transportation networks more accessible to all types of users through effective planning and local project development. Programs like USDOT’s *Safe Streets for All* aim to capture these local planning efforts and make implementation of needed safety countermeasures affordable through planning and infrastructure grant funding. Come learn about these concepts from NADO staff and hear recent examples presented by colleagues in Southeast Kansas.

- *Carey Spoon, Executive Director, Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission*
- *Bret Alphin, Associate Director, NADO*
- *Haley Schultheis, Program Manager, NADO*

### **Meeting the Childcare Challenge**

*Capitol 3*

Access to affordable, high-quality childcare is essential for workforce participation, business growth, and regional economic resilience. This session will examine the role of childcare in economic development and community well-being, highlight successful EDD initiatives in the childcare space, and explore innovative policy solutions in Colorado and beyond. Join us to discuss how regions can build awareness and invest in childcare as critical infrastructure to support workers, employers, and long-term economic vitality.

- *Maya Gould, Vice President of Research, Colorado Children’s Campaign*
- *Sharon Hueftle, Executive Director, South Central Economic Development District*
- *Wylie Philips, Director, Northern Rocky Mountain Economic Development District*

**11:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

**Closing Plenary:**

### **The State of the Region: A Snapshot of Economic Development Trends and Actions**

*Capitol 4-7*

- *Brian Kelsey, Manager, Economic Development Advisory Services, Ernst & Young LLP*
- *Moderator: Rick Hunsaker, Executive Director, Region XII COG (IA) and President, NADO*

### **Post Conference Event**



