

REGION 9 EDD
CENTER ON RURAL INNOVATION
SW CO ACCELERATOR PROGRAM FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Tech-Based Entrepreneurship in Small Places

October 14, 2025

National Association of Development
Organizations



Introductions



**Laura Lewis
Marchino**

Region 9 Economic
Development District,
Durango, CO



Trish Thibodo

Center on Rural Innovation



Heather Otter

SCAPE

Durango, CO

Rural Economic Development: Rural is the new cool!

Region 9 is one of 14 regions in
Colorado
Economic Development District &
Council of Governments

26-member Board including 17
government jurisdictions and 9
private sector members.

**CELEBRATING 35
years!!!**



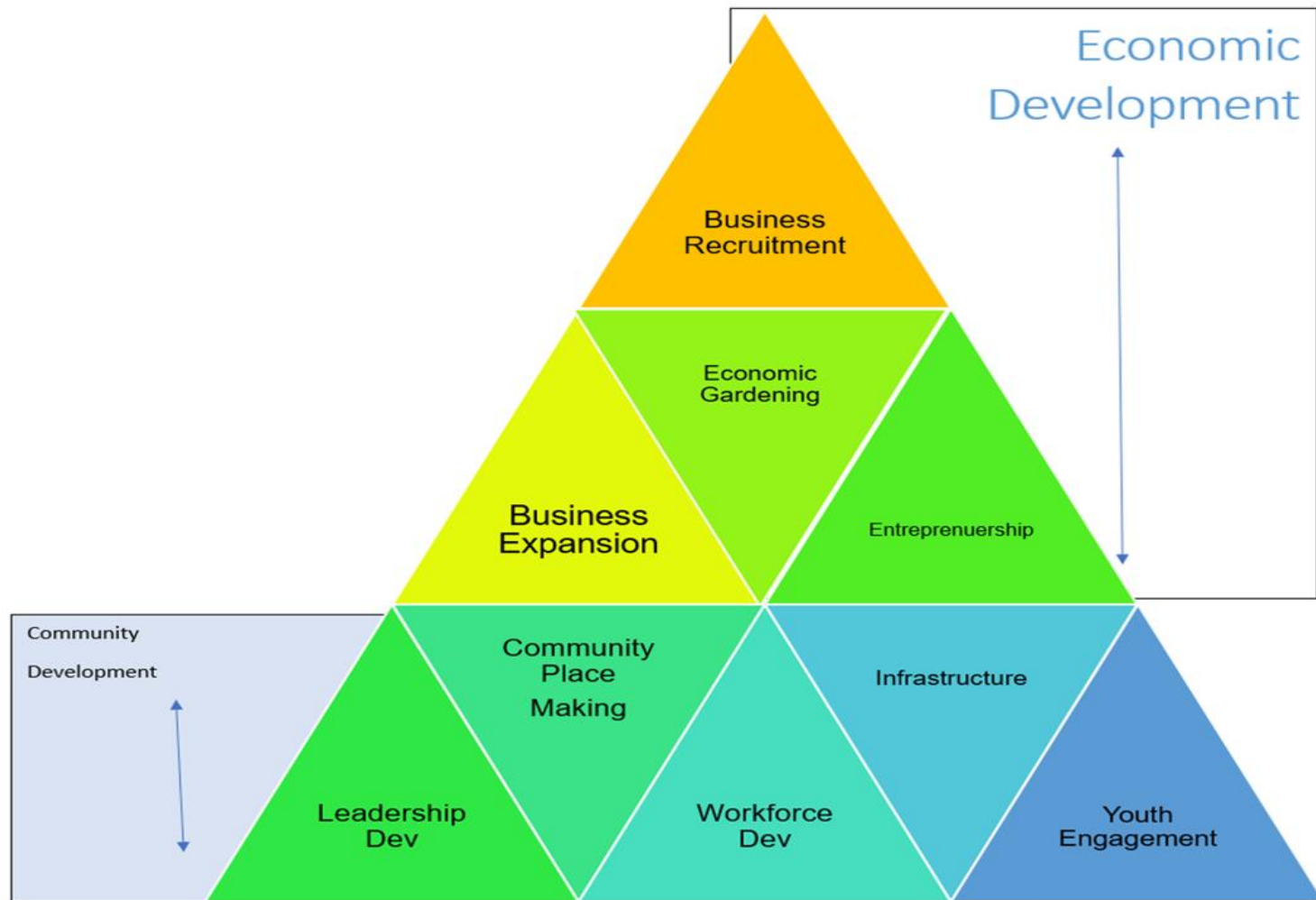
Programs

- SouthWEST Opioid Response District
- Transit and transportation connectivity
- Data dashboard/reports/Commercial Real Estate Search tools
- Grant Navigation services
- Business Loan Fund
- SW Colorado Council of Governments
- Oversee Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Build middle mile broadband infrastructure
- Regional Housing coordination
- Economic development business & community support
- San Juan Resource Conservation District
- Enterprise Zone Tax Credits

Rural the new COOL?

- Downtown: It's Rise and Fall, 1880 - 1950- Oxford Academic
- "Rural is the New Inner City" – Wall Street Journal May 2017
- COVID Pandemic and remote work movement 2021
- "Downtown Denver went from boom to slump". Denverite 6.23.23
- "The Rural Migration Trend: What to make of It, Why It's Happening and Where It's Headed" – AEM 3.18.24





RURAL STRATEGIES

1. Place based
2. Economic gardening
3. Entrepreneurial
Innovation
4. Regionalism



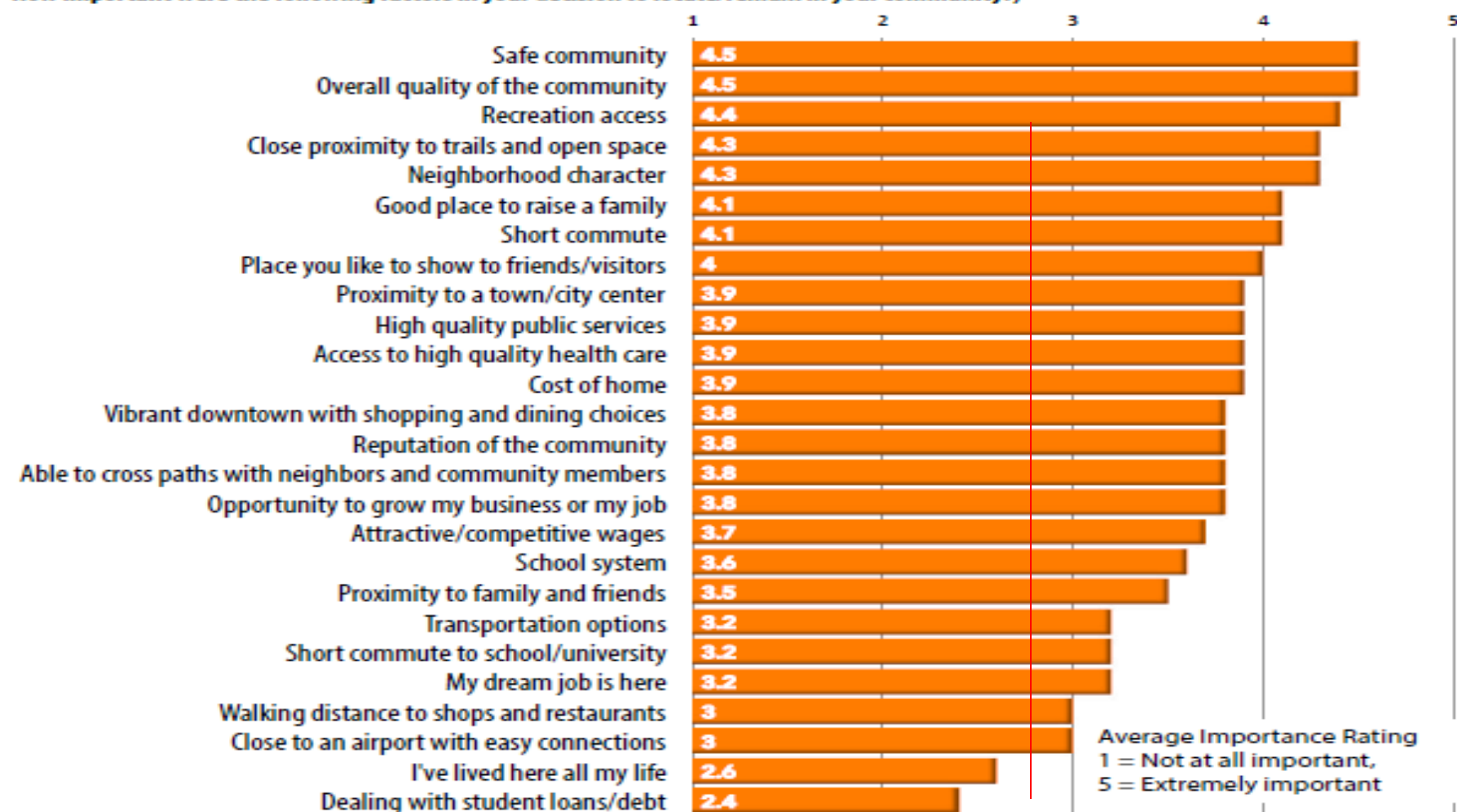
Place Based

Build communities people want to live in.

- *“Love your town like you love your sports team”* Different for each person
- Find out why people love your community
- Prioritize and preserve place attractiveness!!
- Strive for balance of Business, Place and People-Based Strategies
- What are your assets that make you unique and you can leverage



How important were the following factors in your decision to locate/remain in your community?)



Wealthworks.org - eight capitals



Social



Political



Natural



Cultural



Built



Financial



Individual



Intellectual

2. Economic Gardening

- Retain & grow your own jobs
- More efficient to solve problems and keep those already invested in community
- Builds ambassador network & informs your recruitment
- Jobs following people
- 80% of job growth local
- Never forget your existing economic base

“Every big business was once a small business”

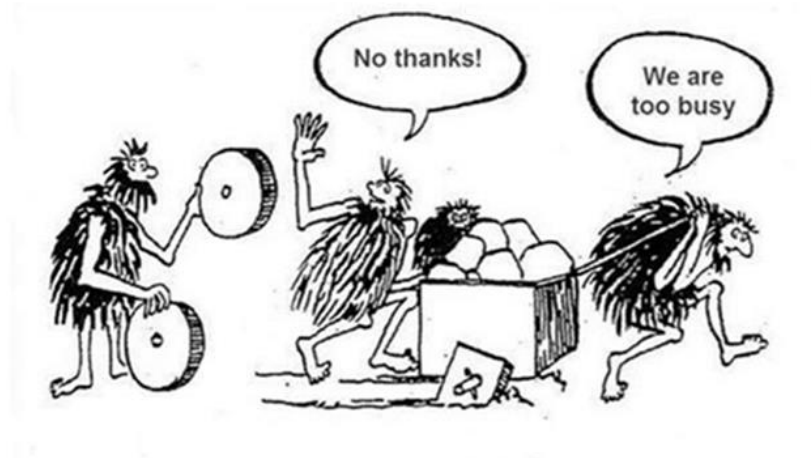




- **We all have that business...**
- Started with downtown storefront
- Grew to international markets
- Product still shipped from Durango factory
- Started own trucking company to combat transportation issues

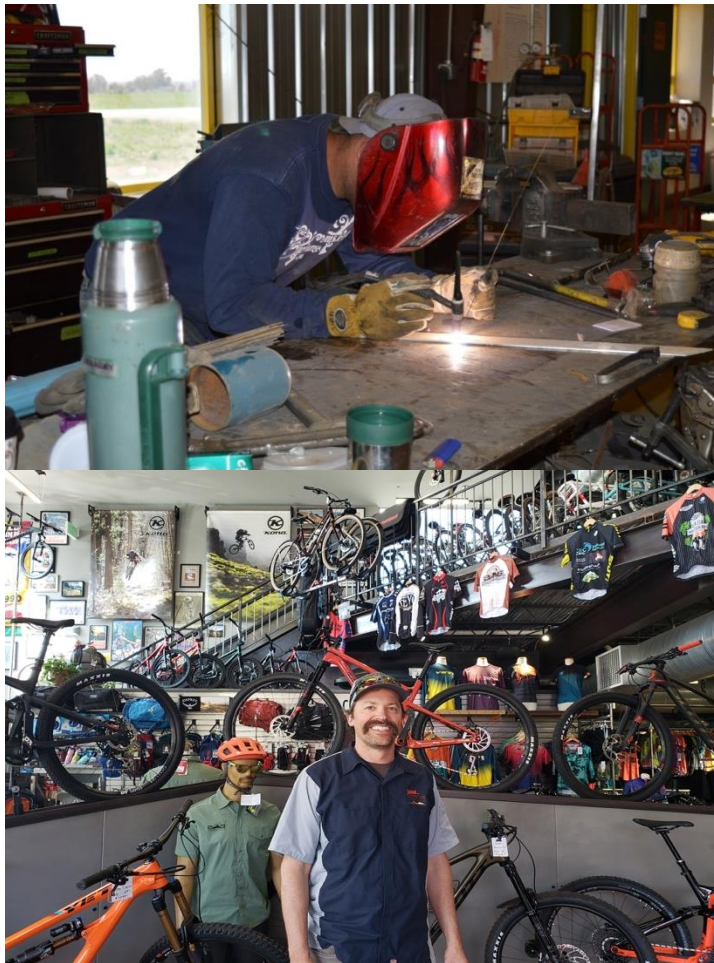


3. Strengthen Entrepreneurial Environment



New Businesses.....

- Create Innovation
- Increases community wealth
 - Diversify the economy
- Increase “backward migration”
 - Increase lifetime income
 - Reduce leakage
- Fight inequality and poverty



In SW Colorado 91% of Companies have 9 or fewer employees

4. REGIONALISM

Every community can't support a
Airport
Hospital
College...

- Creates critical mass
- Increases resiliency/social safety net
- Establishes productive rural-urban linkages
- Expands resource base and markets



**Tech
entrepreneurship
grows resilient
rural economies**

UNLOCKING RURAL POTENTIAL

The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) envisions a new era of prosperity for rural America in the age of innovation.

We create opportunities that empower rural people to thrive in the tech economy.



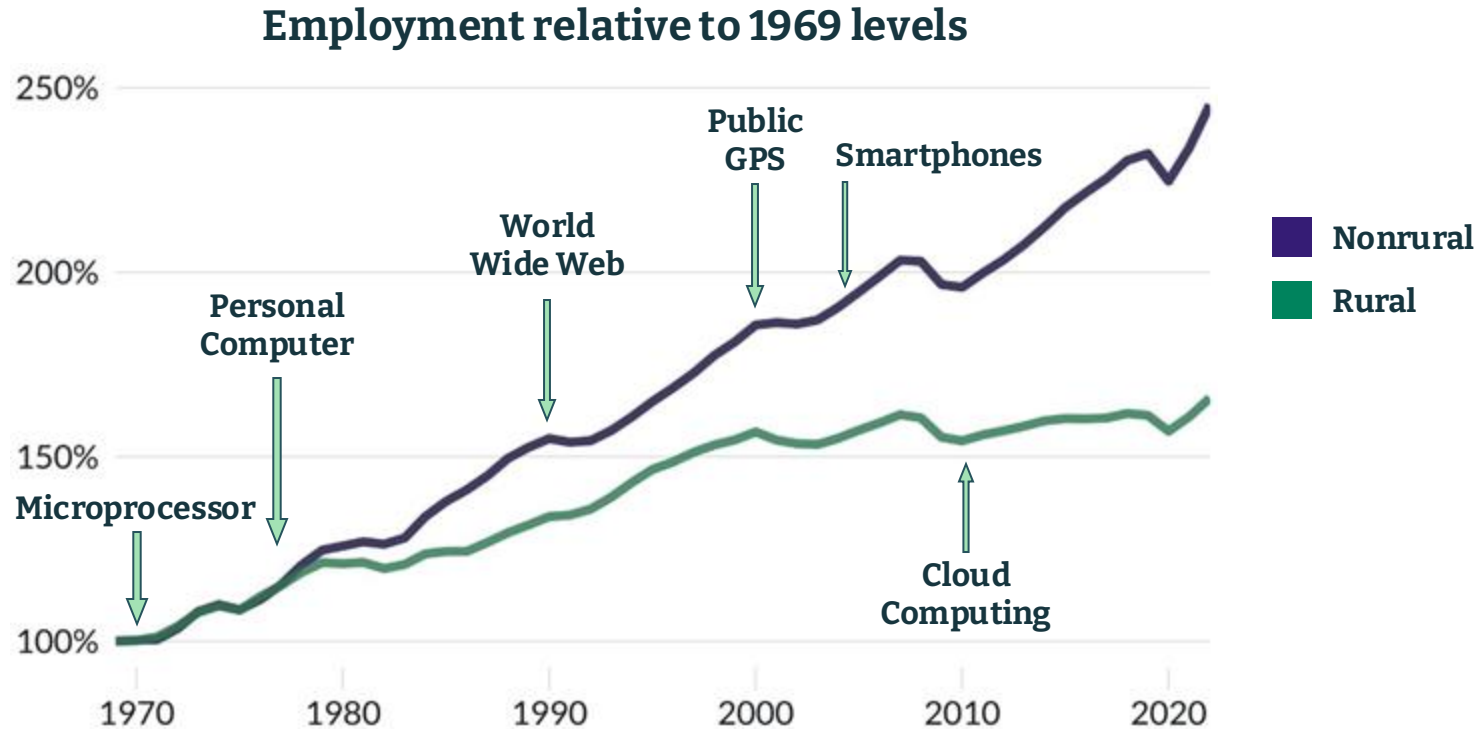
A woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a dark blue blazer, is seated at a wooden desk. She is looking at a computer monitor that displays a webpage. The desk is cluttered with various items, including a laptop, papers, and a small red object. Behind her is a brick wall. To the right of the woman, there is a dark blue triangular graphic that contains white text.

OUR VISION

In the age of the internet, there should be no limit to where tech talent and visionary founders can thrive.



Rural America has been left behind during the rise of the knowledge economy



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Tech advancement gaps have led to many of the challenges rural communities face today



Economic decline and **lack of diversification**



Workforce gaps and outwards **migration**



Population loss and aging demographics



Low civic and institutional **capacity**

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?



Automation



Globalization



**Decline in
entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship rebuilds local wealth and creates jobs

- Creates new jobs (local labor demand)
- Creates economic growth and new wealth for reinvestment in communities
- Innovations improve quality of life
- Improves U.S. position in global economic competition

([Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#))



[Evaguel Rhysing, President and CEO of United Aircraft Technologies](#)
The Berkshires, MA

WHAT DOES SCALABLE TECH ENTREPRENEURSHIP LOOK LIKE?

Small businesses

The local auto shop — if it's tech-enabled, it has a website with their number to call to book an appointment online.

- *Small local businesses are invaluable community assets, but not the focus of this work*



Scalable tech startups

The platform that powers and enables the auto shop to schedule appointments and track service and payments digitally

- *Focusing on scalable tech entrepreneurship inspires a culture of innovation and creates high-paying jobs*



BARRIERS FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURS



**STARTUP
IDEA**



FINANCING

CONNECTIONS

PROGRAMMING

NARRATIVE



**STARTUP
GROWTH**

Tech-based economic development offers a path to the benefits of a tech economy



Tech-Based Economic Development (TBED) is an economic development approach that focuses on supporting technology innovation to drive economic prosperity

**Increased
Investment**

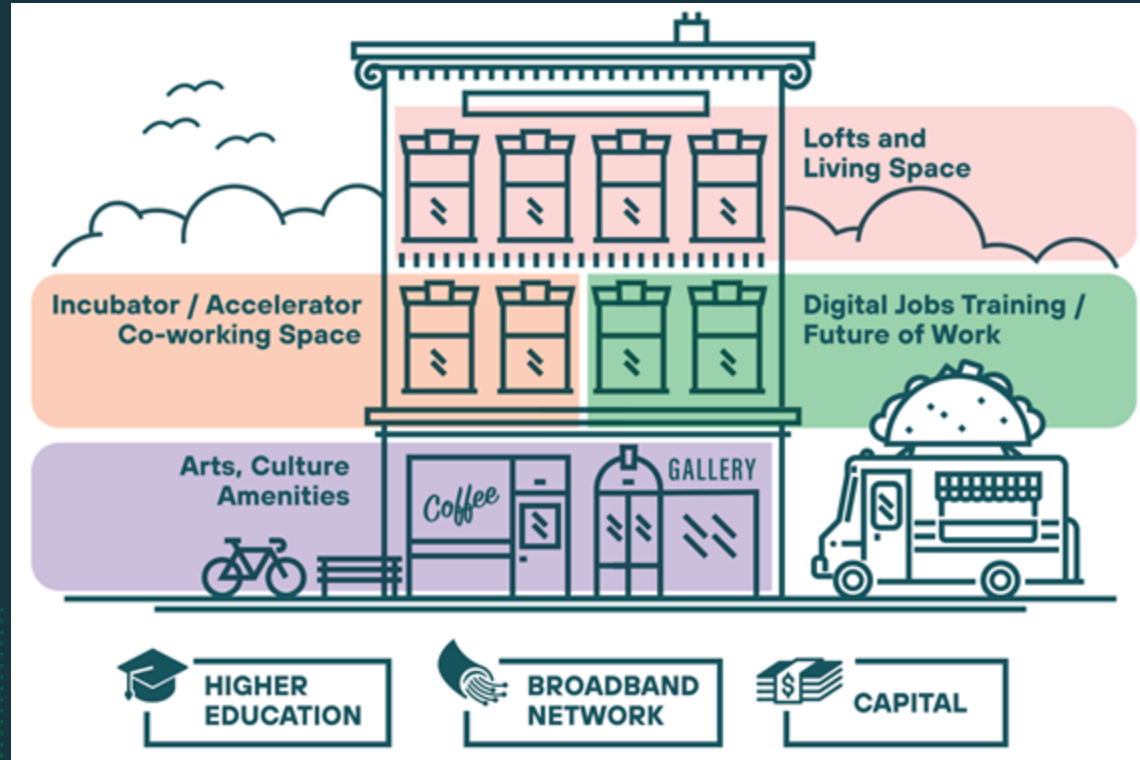
**Economic
Diversity**

**Talent
Retention**

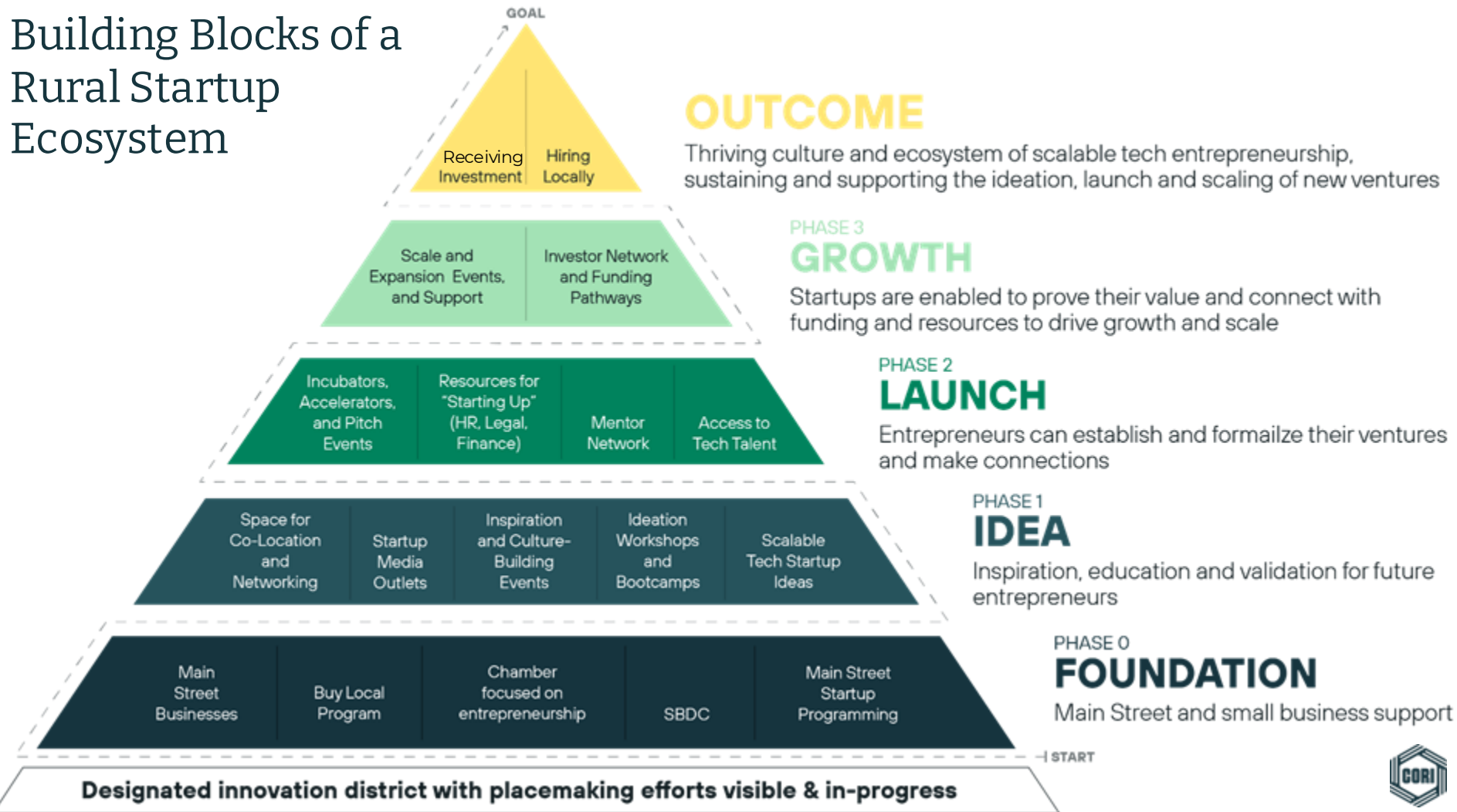
**More
Jobs**

**Future -
Proof**

Innovation works alongside Main Street businesses – not in place of them



Building Blocks of a Rural Startup Ecosystem



Doing this work starts with believing you can, and knowing it won't look the same in every place



Most communities already have the tools they need to get started; progress doesn't have to follow a linear path.

Local capacity varies—an Executive Director may not be the right fit; leadership could come from an entrepreneur, volunteer, or other local champion.

Adopt an entrepreneurial, scrappy approach. Try to make the most of available resources.

AI tools and approaches may require flexibility and adaptation, especially when rural solutions differ from urban models.

Case Study: SCAPE Durango



- Technical Assistance for Growth Companies
- Mentoring and Advising
- Long Term Support



- Early-Stage Risk Capital
- Local Angel Investors
- Elevating Community Job Creation





GeekPack® exists to empower women and girls to change their lives for the better through the power of code, community, and confidence

www.geekpack.com



Founder, Julia Taylor





Agolix is a B2B SaaS tool that easily creates online surveys, quizzes and assessments that provide customized feedback to each respondent. This provides a tangible way for coaches and consultants to demonstrate their expertise to their ideal clients.

www.agolix.com



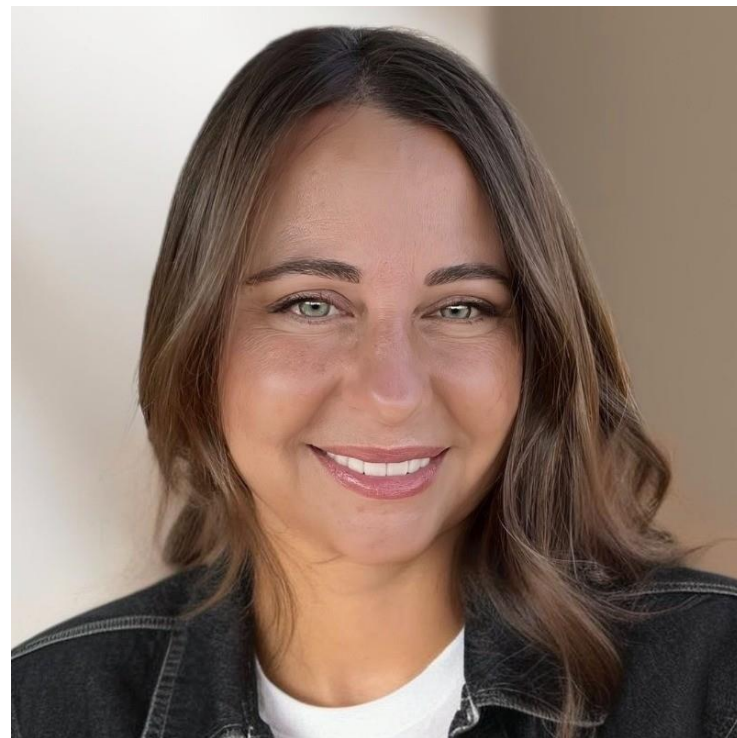
Co-Founder, Jen Sparks





My Innerframe addresses the influences of media consumption with uniquely tailored content that enhances personal growth and mental well-being through neuroplasticity and AI.

www.myinnerframe.com



Founder, Erica Hines MS, CWWPC



BOPA

PRECISION AGRICULTURE

Solutions for your farm that boosts your efficiency, reduces physical stress, and enhances sustainability practices?

<https://barnowlag.com/>



Founder, Sarah Hinkley

STAY CONNECTED, EFFORTLESSLY



LET'S SHINE A LIGHT ON RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

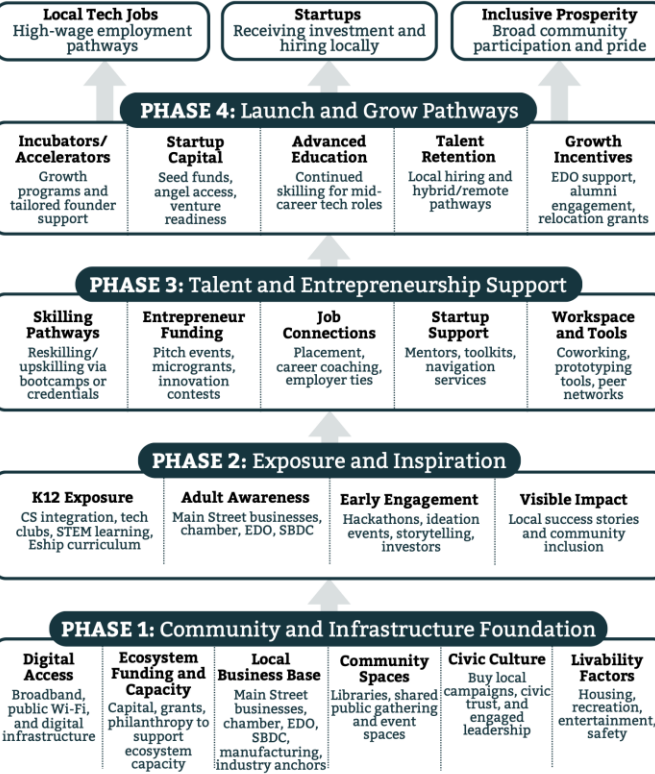
www.goscape.org | 970-317-0880 |
heather@goscape.org

STAY CONNECTED, EFFORTLESSLY

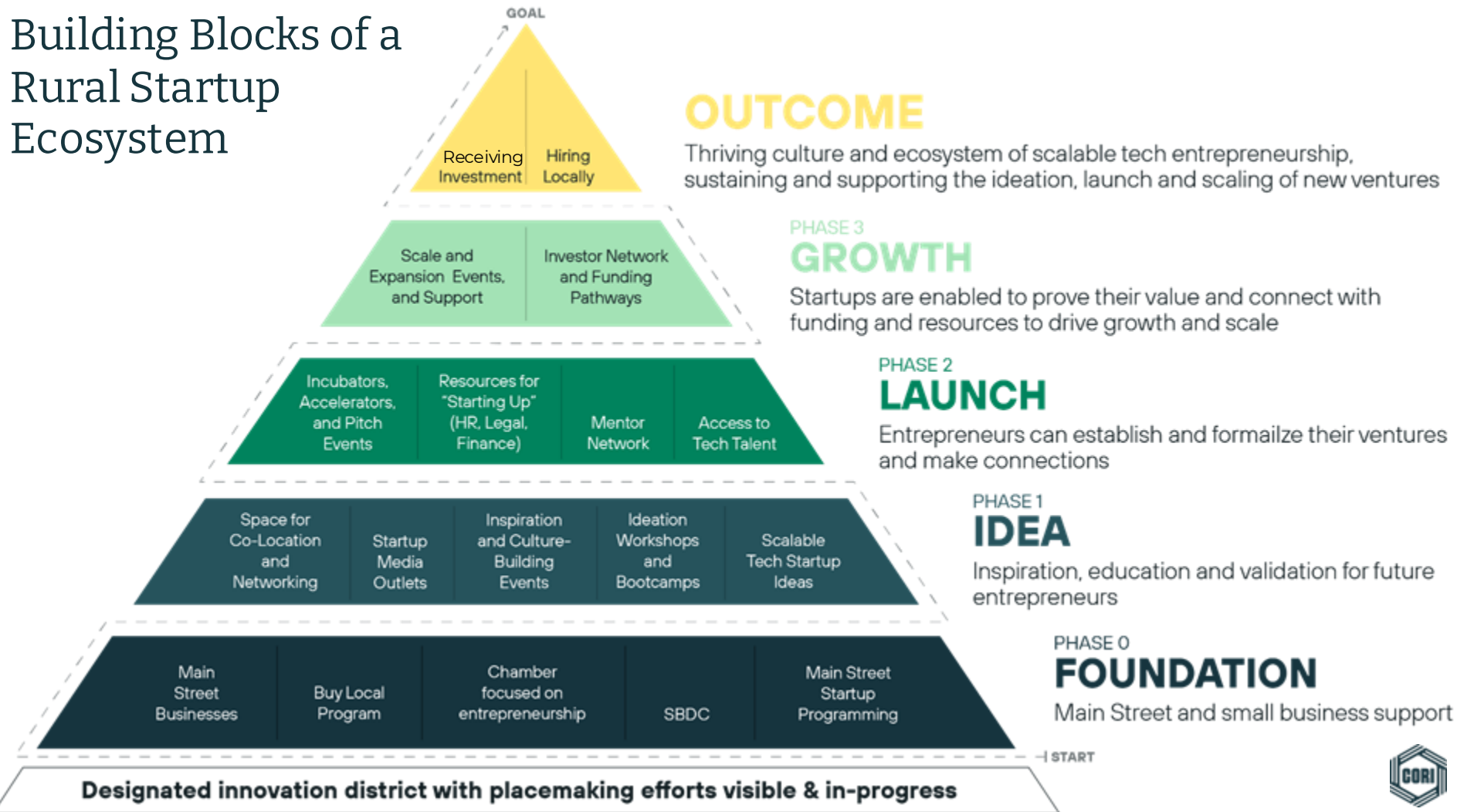


Mapping Your Ecosystem

Building an Innovation Ecosystem



Building Blocks of a Rural Startup Ecosystem



Thank you

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