

EMERGENT LEARNING

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# Economic Development Fundamentals

SWREDA Annual Conference | Austin, TX | April 15, 2026

# Today's Session

4:05 – 4:20

**Sasha Nelson, MSc, EDP, CEcD & ERC Fellow**

Northwest Colorado Coal Just Transition + Lessons from the Field

4:20 – 4:35

**Celia Kirkland**

Rural Mental Health & Workforce — Eastern Plains COG

4:35 – 4:50

**Shaharia Bhuiyan**

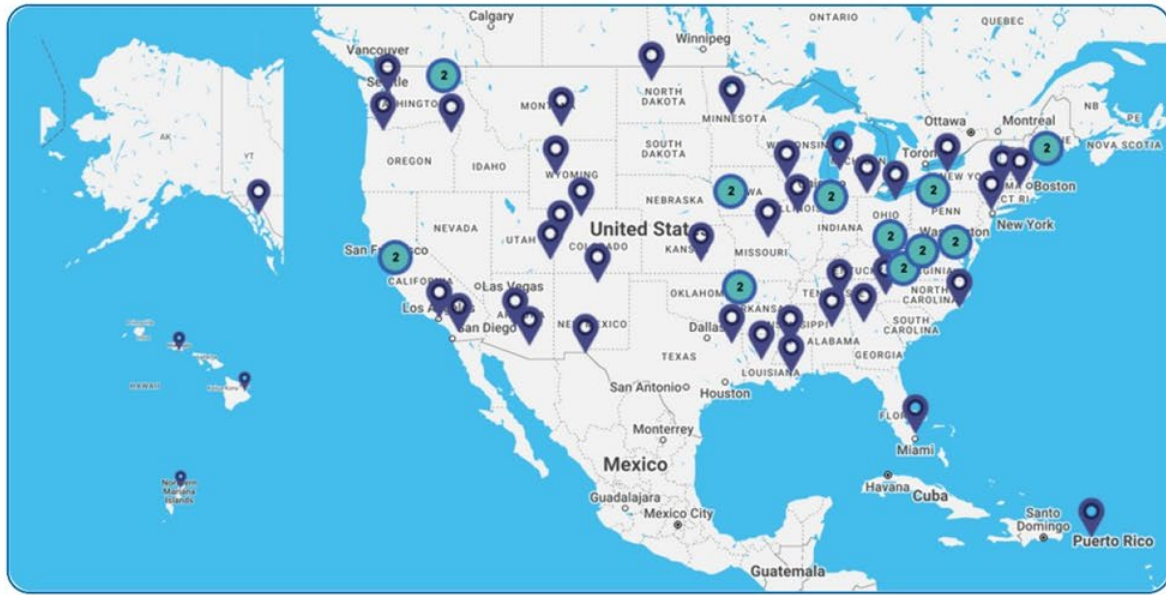
Disaster Resilience & Economic Development — Capital Region Planning

4:50 – 5:00

**Q&A**

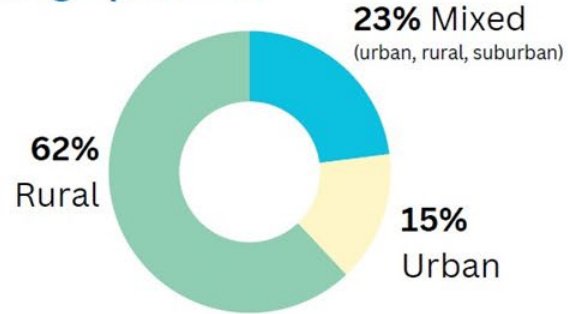
Discussion with the full panel

# 65 Fellows, 65 Catalytic Projects, 42 States, 2 Territories



ERC Fellows are working alongside Host Organizations in communities large and small, including nine Tribal Nations, two U.S. territories, and 5 multi-state collaboratives.

## Geographic Mix



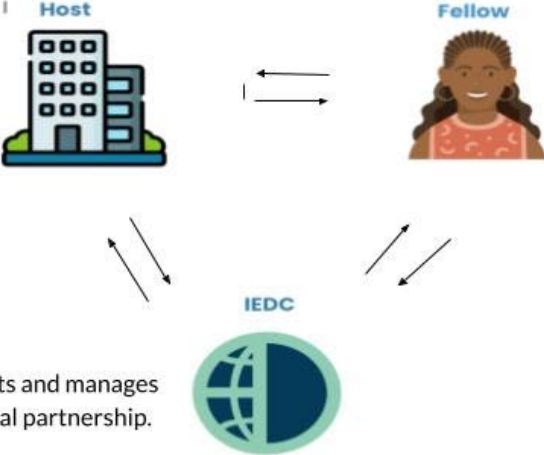
Principles include:

- 1. Locally-driven & equitable outcomes
- 2. Collaboration, shared learning, mutual support
- 3. Sustained impact
- 4. Open communication

# Partnerships + Principles



## Key Relationships



IEDC represents and manages the ERC national partnership.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY CORPS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



## Fellows

65% 10+ years of experience

69% Women

54% Identify as a person of color

40% Come from host community or region



## Projects



Broadband



Housing



Childcare



Downtown Revitalization



Technology & Innovation



Workforce Development



Tourism & Recreation



Sustainability & Climate Resilience



Small business, Entrepreneurship, Access to Capital



Transportation & Infrastructure

## Host Organizations

- City and county governments
- Regional coalitions and partnerships
- Tribal Nations
- Economic development organizations (EDOs)
- Economic Development Districts (EDDs)
- Entrepreneurial support organizations
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)
- Nonprofits and technical assistance providers

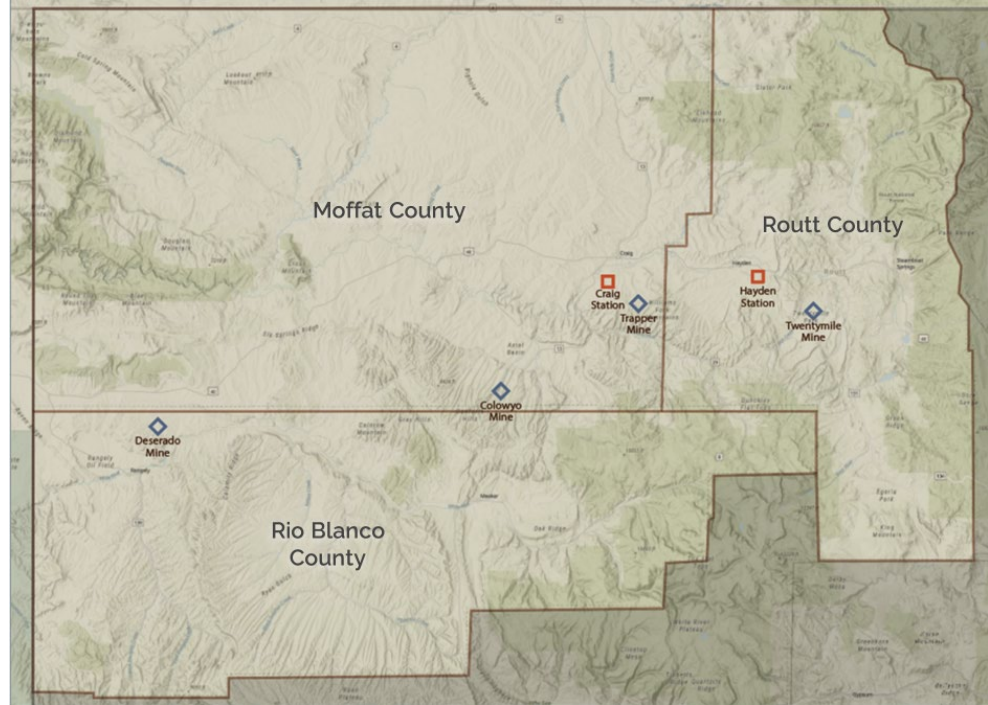
# Northwest Colorado

**Large land area, 3 Counties, 10,342 sq miles (larger than Vermont)**

- Over 50% is public land, limited private ownership

**Small population, 44,650 residents**

**Micro region**



# Energy Transition

- **2 Closing Power Plants by 2028**
  - Hayden Generating Station
  - Craig Generating Station
- **4 Coal Mines**
  - Colowyo closed 2025, Trapper 2026, Twentymile, and Deserado Mines
- Estimated **2,800+ jobs** and **22% regional GDP** will be lost
- Estimated GDP loss of **more than 50%** depending on taxing district.



# NORTHWEST COLORADO DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

**Vision:** Northwest Colorado will be a thriving economic center with a diverse economy anchored by numerous outdoor recreation activities throughout the year, generation of power to fuel the western U.S., diverse agricultural and food economic activity, and manufacturing.

1

## OBJECTIVE

Enable Economic Transition & Growth

2

## OBJECTIVE

Create a More Livable Region

ECONOMIC  
DIVERSIFICATION  
& RESILIENCY

WORKFORCE

HOUSING

CHILD CARE

REGIONAL  
TRANSPORTATION

# Northwest Colorado: The Work & The Stakes

- ERC Fellow hosted by Routt County Economic Development Partnership
- Work spans all of Northwest Colorado — one of the largest U.S. coal Just Transition regions
- Led the region's first Business Retention & Expansion program
- Launched Northwest Colorado's first micro-revolving loan fund
- Author of Colorado's first coal worker survey

BY THE NUMBERS

25+

regional projects advised

\$75M+

in grants secured

400–450

jobs projected

\$4B+

in new capital investment advanced

# Community-Led Is Not a Value — It's a Method

## 1 Nothing about them without them.

The most impacted community members are authors of the strategy — not its audience.

## 2 Ask before telling.

Communities know what they need. Our job is to organize, amplify, and connect.

## 3 Regionalism is where this scales.

No single county has the data or leverage to compete alone. A region does.

▶ *STORY: EDA Support*

# The Data Gap Is a Funding Gap

Rural communities are systematically undercounted by census and traditional datasets — which means underfunded by formulas tied to population.

## ARPA Formula Disparity

Impoverished small communities received the same per-capita ARPA funding as wealthier small communities — regardless of need.\*

## WE FILL THE DATA GAP

### Storytelling & Listening Sessions

Local knowledge as  
primary data

### Ripple Effects Mapping

Surface 2nd & 3rd  
order impacts

### Proxy Indicators

School enrollment,  
utility connections

### Regional Aggregation

Tell the story no  
county can tell alone

\*Source: Upjohn Institute analysis of ARPA SLFRF formula allocation disparities

# Trust Is the Infrastructure

## 01 Earn the right to be heard.

Rural and distressed communities have been overpromised by outside institutions. Don't arrive with a solution. Arrive with a question. Listening first is not a technique — it is the work.

## 02 Show up consistently, not just strategically.

Trust is built between visits, not during them. Attending the county fair matters. Following up on a conversation from three months ago matters. Presence over time is the signal that you are not a consultant — you are a partner.

## 03 Be transparent about what you can and cannot do.

Overpromising is the fastest way to lose trust in a community that has already been let down. Say what you will do, do what you say, and name your limits clearly. Credibility is built on honesty, not optimism.

## 04 Share power — don't just talk about it.

Community members need to be authors of the strategy, not recipients of it. Co-design processes, share credit visibly, and make sure your presence builds local capacity rather than replacing it.



# **ECONOMIC CATALYSTS**

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**Up next: Celia Kirkland**

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