



COLORADO
Department of Local Affairs



COLORADO
Office of Economic Development
& International Trade



COLORADO COVID-19 REGIONAL RESILIENCY & RECOVERY ROADMAPS

MONTEZUMA REGIONAL COMMUNITY ROADMAP PLAN

DECEMBER 11, 2022 -- *FINAL DRAFT*

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I. Acknowledgements & Background

Acknowledgments

The “Colorado COVID-19 Regional Resiliency and Recovery Roadmaps Program” (henceforth “Roadmaps Program”) has been funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration and administered by the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Colorado Resiliency Office in partnership with the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), and Community Builders. Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) was hired to lead the Montezuma Regional Community Team through Phase II of the Roadmap process, which has resulted in this Recovery and Resiliency Roadmap Plan.

Recovery Project Manager - DOLA

- *Morgan Ferris*, Economic Recovery Project Manager

Consultant Team: Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.)

www.pumaworldhq.com

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Montezuma Regional Community Team Leads

- *Nichole Glaser*, Montezuma County Grants Writer
- *Rachael Marchbanks*, City of Cortez Director of Community & Economic Development)
- *Heather Otter*, Region 9, Economic Development Specialist
- *Shak Powers*, Montezuma County Administrator
- *Jessica Thurman*, Montezuma County Economic Development Coordinator

Montezuma Regional Team Participants

See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of individuals and partners who participated in this process.

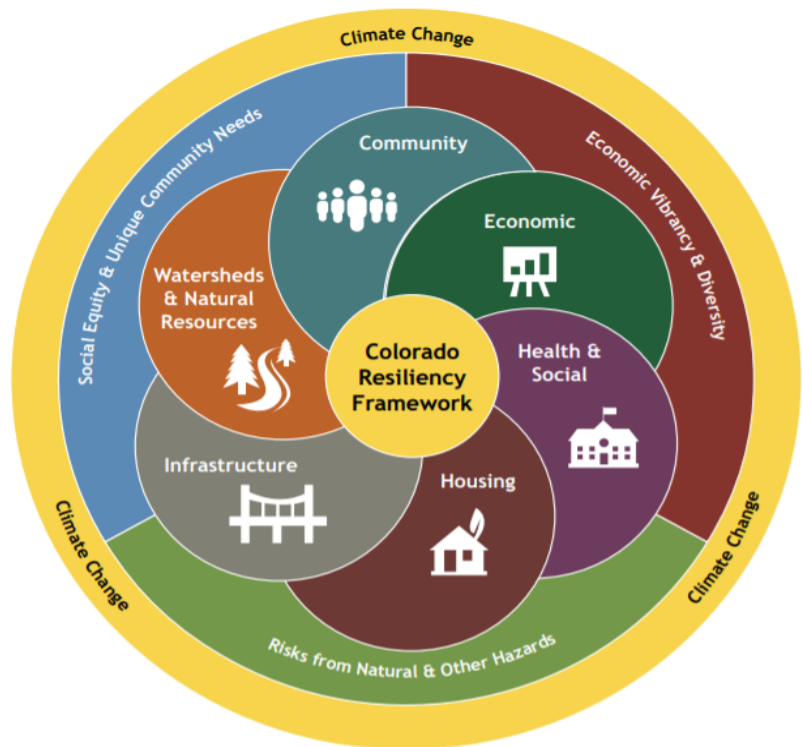
Background

The COVID-19 pandemic caused one of the greatest disruptions of our lifetimes, requiring our communities to partner across jurisdictional boundaries in order to effectively respond to change and elevate community assets to solve shared problems. The Roadmaps Program has provided 16 Regional Community Teams in rural Colorado with the opportunity to work together through a two-year planning and implementation process to support diversifying and strengthening their economies while also building regional resiliency. The planning process has taken a holistic economic and community development approach, which has equipped communities to not only better recover from COVID, but also to be more resilient to future shocks and stressors. This Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap Plan documents the prioritized and regionally-aligned objectives, actionable strategies, and implementation plan for the Montezuma Regional Community Team.

The Montezuma regional team is one of 16 Colorado regions developing resiliency plans through the Roadmaps Program. Each team is working toward building consensus on solutions for a range of different issues related to economy and workforce development, climate and natural resources, essential infrastructure, food and agriculture, housing, and building community capacity.

Additional information, including an archive of the other Regional Community Teams’ final Roadmaps, is available at: www.coresiliency.com/roadmap-program.

The Colorado Resiliency Office (CRO) defines resiliency as the ability of communities to rebound, positively adapt to, or thrive amidst changing conditions or challenges - including human-caused and natural disasters - and to maintain quality of life, healthy growth, durable systems, economic vitality, and conservation of resources for present and future generations.



II. Regional Partnership & Process Overview

Montezuma Regional Community Team Overview

In their EDA Recovery Roadmaps application, the Montezuma County Regional team participants highlighted several key challenges impacting their community. These topics included drought and water resources, agricultural viability and food security, poverty and economic opportunity, mental and behavioral health (including substance abuse challenges), youth retention, childcare availability, housing availability and affordability, reduced tax revenue from operations like oil and gas, and challenges faced by workers, businesses, and industry in the wake of COVID-19. These issues were further explored and refined through an extensive process of community engagement and research that helped guide the development of Montezuma Roadmap strategies and actions.

A description of the initial Montezuma Roadmap priorities (organized by P.U.M.A. based on Groundwork notes and additional feedback) can be found in [Task A Deliverable](#). The Task A Deliverable report contains the following information:

- Kickoff Meeting Takeaways
- Project Management Timeline
- List of Background Materials Reviewed
- High-Level Takeaways from Materials Reviewed

Primary Entities Represented on the Regional Team

Tribes	Counties	Municipalities	Economic Development Entities	Education Institutions	Other Entities
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe	Dolores County	City of Cortez	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce	CSU Extension	Axis Health System
	Montezuma County	Town of Dolores	Dolores Chamber of Commerce	M-CHS (Homegrown Talent Initiative)	Mesa Verde County Tourism
		Town of Dove Creek	Dolores County Dev. Corp. (DCDC)	Pueblo Community College (PCC) SW	Pinon Project
		Town of Mancos	Region 9 Economic Development District		Southwest Health Systems
		Town of Rico	Colorado Workforce		United Way of Southwest Colorado

Many additional jurisdictions, organizations, and people were involved in the Roadmaps process. Full lists of Regional Team meeting attendees can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Planning Process Overview

Expected Outcomes and Guiding Principles

- The plan should be action-oriented, realistic, and implementable!
- Focus on solutions and don't reinvent the wheel
- The process should be inclusive and equitable
- Priority projects should be those that provide a jumping off point for future efforts
- The plan should lay the groundwork for more collaborative economic/community development initiatives and strengthen public trust.

Timeline and Scope

Phase 1: Groundwork

The Groundwork phase kicked off in the summer of 2021 and lasted through December 2021. During this phase, Regional Community Teams were brought together to create alignment and work with the State Recovery Team (in partnership with Community Builders) to identify the priority issues to address through the Roadmaps process. It was also an opportunity to set goals for how to best work together during the subsequent planning and implementation phases. Regional Teams received data packages to help assess top issues and opportunities.

- [Link to Regional Data & Assessment Packet Montezuma County Regional Team](#)
- [Data Packet 6 Month Update](#)

Phase 2: Roadmaps Plan Development

P.U.M.A. was brought into the process after the Groundwork phase to facilitate community dialogue around priority-setting, add depth in data analysis and best practice research, and assist in developing a tailored, implementable action plan.

- **November 2021 through January 2022**
 - Consultant orientation
 - Montezuma Roadmaps Kickoff Call
 - Weekly check-ins with Team Leads
- **February 2022 through June 2022**
 - Extensive research into the six goal areas
 - One-on-one and group stakeholder interviews
 - Six topic-based Regional Team workshops to present and discuss potential strategies, described in more detail below.

- Weekly check-ins with Team Leads
- **June 2022 - September 2022**
 - Refine strategies and actions
 - Develop Roadmaps draft
 - 3- week State Recovery Team review period
 - Feedback from local stakeholders
- **October 2022**
 - Final Regional Team Meeting held on October 17th
 - Additional draft refinements

Phase 3: Implementation

- Beginning in October 2022
- Local partners work to implement the Roadmaps plan

Engagement Summary

Inclusive Engagement

With guidance from the Regional Team, P.U.M.A. developed a community engagement approach that sought to be as inclusive and equitable as possible, given budgetary constraints. A variety of community members were invited to participate in interviews and topic-based workshops. Measures were taken to incorporate input from historically underrepresented and disproportionately impacted communities. The most common method to reach these historically underrepresented and disproportionately impacted communities was “by proxy”: individuals and organizations that represented or worked directly with these populations who could speak to some of the challenges faced by these communities, as well as to existing initiatives and potential solutions, participated in the topic-based workshops and one-on-one meetings. Moving forward, as the Regional Team and community partners work to implement this plan, additional outreach and engagement will be needed to ensure that that diverse voices are represented and that opportunities and impacts are equitable and accessible.

Regional Team Meetings (Topic-Based Workshops)

The consultant team facilitated a series of six meetings (or “workshops”) organized around the preliminary goal areas. The purpose of the workshops was to summarize existing conditions (and fill gaps in knowledge), present and seek feedback on potential strategies, share relevant case studies, and to encourage discussions among participants representing a range of community interests.

- In addition to the core Regional Team participants, other community members were invited to participate in workshops and interviews. A complete list of individual attendees for each workshop can be found in [Appendix A](#).
- To prepare for the topic-based workshops, the consultant team, with support from the Team Leads and Recovery Project Manager, conducted **one-on-one** and **group interviews** with experts, key stakeholders, and entities that represent the interests of disproportionately impacted and historically marginalized communities. Individuals interviewed are listed below.

Business Support Systems (March 10, 2022) and Attracting & Expanding Industry (March 28, 2022)

Individuals Interviewed:

- *Montezuma Regional Team Leads*
- *Cory Bryndal*, Region 10 Economic Development, Regional Broadband Director
- *Vanessa McCrann*, Startup Colorado, Community Engagement Coordinator
- *Peter Ortego*, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Department of Justice Director
- *Gus Westerman*, Dolores County Development Corporation & CSU Extension Dolores County
- *Chad Wheelus*, M-CHS Homegrown Talent Initiative Coordinator

Water & Agricultural Resources (April 14, 2022)

Individuals Interviewed:

- *Travis Custer*, Montezuma Land Conservancy, Executive Director
- *Heather Houk*, Agriculture Curriculum Coordinator, Pueblo Community College Southwest
- *Laurie Hall*, Montezuma Food Coalition & The Share House
- *Simon Martinez*, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Farm and Ranch Enterprise
- *Mike Preston*, Southwest Basin Roundtable Chairman & President of UMUT Enterprise Board
- *David Stoner*, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Natural Resource Specialist
- *Peter Ortego*, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Department of Justice Director

Education & Workforce Development (April 29, 2022)

Individuals Interviewed:

- *Dr. Sam Dosumu*, Executive Dean, Pueblo Community College Southwest
- *Lyneth Fuller*, Employment Specialist, Cortez Workforce Center
- *Heather Houk*, Agriculture Program Coordinator, Pueblo Community College SW
- *Janae Huberman*, Education Consultant, Colorado Workforce Development Council
- *Ray Lucero*, Western Region Director, CDLE
- *Dr. Roberto Montoya*, Chief Educational Equity Officer, CDHE
- *Heather Otter*, Economic Development Project Manager, Region 9
- *Chad Wheelus*, M-CHS Homegrown Talent Initiative Coordinator

- *UMUT education staff*

Housing Choice & Affordability (May 26, 2022)

Individuals Interviewed:

- *Gwendolyn Cantsee*, Chairwoman of the Housing Authority Board of Directors & Director for the White Mesa Community
- *Olivia Cook*, Housing Development Specialist, Division of Housing
- *Rachael Marchbanks*, Community and Economic Development Director, City of Cortez
- *Valerie Root*, Assistant Director, Ute Mountain Housing Authority
- *Elizabeth Salkind*, Executive Director, Housing Solutions for the Southwest
- *Kellie Willis*, Executive Director, Pinion Project

Mental & Behavioral Health (June 23, 2022)

Individuals Interviewed:

- *Axis Health Systems* - Haley Leonard-Saunders (Director of Public Relations)
- *Law Enforcement* - Chief Knuckles (City of Cortez Chief of Police), Sheriff Nowlin (Montezuma County Sheriff)
- *Team Up (United Way)* - Emily Huminski (Team Up Coordinator)
- *UMUT Staff* - DeAnn House (Mógúán Mental Health Center), Christine Williams (Interim Director Counseling and Treatment Services), Timothy Root (Recidivism Reduction Director), Tom Stephenson (Emergency Services Director)

October 2022: Final Presentation

- The consultant and Team Leads facilitated a final presentation to the Regional Community Team and broader community on October 17, 2022. The meeting took place in-person, and a few dozen participants attended virtually through Zoom.
- The [presentation slides are linked here](#).

Links to Workshop Notes and Materials

The linked [Google Drive folder](#) contains the following for each workshop:

- Zoom recording
- Meeting notes
- Presentation slides

Appendix contains:

- [List of attendees for each workshop](#)

III. Community Assessment

Overview & Methodology

The following section summarizes key challenges and opportunities identified through quantitative research and through the Roadmaps engagement process. The assessment is used to guide the strategies and actions described in sections IV and V. In addition to individual and group interviews, the consultant team reviewed a range of primary and secondary source materials to inform this analysis. More detailed background information, data, and primary resources can be found in the appendix, including a list of materials reviewed and referenced for this report.

Community Context

Defining the Region

For the purposes of this planning effort, the "Montezuma Region" is geographically defined by the geographic boundaries of Montezuma and Dolores counties which includes the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. The region's largest municipalities are Cortez (pop. 8,766), Mancos (pop. 1,196), Towaoc (1,120), Dolores (town, pop. 885), Dove Creek (pop. 635) and Rico (288).¹

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and other Federally Recognized Tribes: The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT) is headquartered in Towaoc, Colorado in the southwest corner of the state. The UMUT is one of 573 federally recognized tribes and has approximately 2,150 enrolled members who traditionally call themselves Núchíú. While the UMUT is headquartered in Towaoc, the Tribe has reservation lands in Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. There are a number of other Tribes in the Four Corners Region, including the Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT) and Navajo Nation.

Key Demographic Indicators

Total Population

- **Net gains:** Between 2010 and 2020, while some rural municipalities experienced population losses, the region has added population and is expected to maintain a growth rate of around 3% over the next 5+ years.² On par with the state's average growth rate, Montezuma County's population is expected to grow modestly between 2020 and 2050, to reach over 34,000 people.³

¹ US Census 2020

² "Economy Overview" EMSI report (from CDLE)

³ State Demography Office estimates

- **Dolores County grew but could experience declines:** The county grew by 12%, adding an estimated 262 people between 2010 and 2020. According to State forecasts, the total population of Dolores County could decline, depending on job growth and other variables.

Race & Ethnicity

- **Montezuma County's demographic diversity:** At 12.2%, Montezuma County has the highest percentage of "American Indian Alone" out of all counties in the state (12.2%). Montezuma County's population is roughly 69.8% White Alone, 12.2% American Indian Alone, 12.0% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 4.7% two or more races, and 1.3% all other.⁴
- **Dolores County is slightly less diverse:** Dolores County is 83.8% White Alone, 7.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race, and 1.5% American Indian Alone.⁵

Age Distribution

- **Skewing Older:** Montezuma County's age distribution deviates somewhat from state averages, with a significant share of the population 55 years and over (36.8% compared to the state at 27.1%). Similarly, the population of Dolores County skews older than the statewide average, with 27.4% of the population aged 65 years and over (compared to 14.7% for the state).⁶
- **"Retirement risk"** is high for the region, referring to people aging out of the workforce at high rates.⁷ However, the labor force population will likely stabilize as the 25–54-year-old cohort experiences substantial growth in the coming years.

Income

- **Lower-than-average incomes:** The median household income for Montezuma County is roughly \$49,470 (in 2019), which is more than \$22K lower than the Colorado statewide median of \$72,331. Dolores County's median household income was \$45,972.⁸

Poverty and Financial Access to Resources

"Populations living in poverty face disproportionate and structural inequities that exacerbate risk and make it difficult to access critical resources and services like healthcare, healthy food, housing, and jobs."

⁴ US Census 2020

⁵ US Census 2020

⁶ 2019 American Community Survey (via State Demography Office)

⁷ "Economy Overview" EMSI report (from CDLE)

⁸ 2019 American Community Survey (via State Demography Office)

- **More households facing poverty:** Montezuma County (15%) and Dolores County (13%) have relatively high poverty rates compared to the state average (9.4%).⁹
- **Financial access to healthcare:** Census tracts within Dolores and Montezuma Counties have uninsured rates ranging from 5% to 37%, which illuminates some of the financial barriers to healthcare access present in the region.

Educational Attainment

- **9 in 10 residents completed high school:** In Montezuma County and Dolores County, 91% and 95% of the population aged 25+ have a high school degree or higher, respectively.¹⁰
- **Educational attainment is slightly lower than statewide averages:** 40% of Montezuma County residents aged 25+ and 37% of Dolores County residents aged 25+ have an Associate Degree or higher, compared to an estimated 49% statewide.¹¹

Jobs & Employment

- **Government, tourism, and healthcare:** Montezuma County's largest industries by employment are government, health services, retail trade, and accommodation and food services (2019 data), and each of these sectors has more or less rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Since 2009, the most significant growth has occurred in health services, agriculture, and education.
- **Agriculture's significance in Dolores County:** The county's largest industries by employment are agriculture, local government, retail trade, accommodation and food services, which have all been increasing in employment since 2009 with the exception of retail trade jobs.
- **Since peak unemployment during the onset of the pandemic, employment rates have stabilized across the region to pre-pandemic levels.**

Population Vulnerability Metrics

Social Vulnerability Index

The *Social Vulnerability Index*, created by the Colorado Resiliency Office, identifies a community's potential risk level for experiencing disproportionate financial and social losses in the event of external stressors, including natural or human-caused disasters. The index aggregates a range of factors including socioeconomic conditions, household composition, minority/language composition, and housing/transportation access.

⁹ U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), 2019

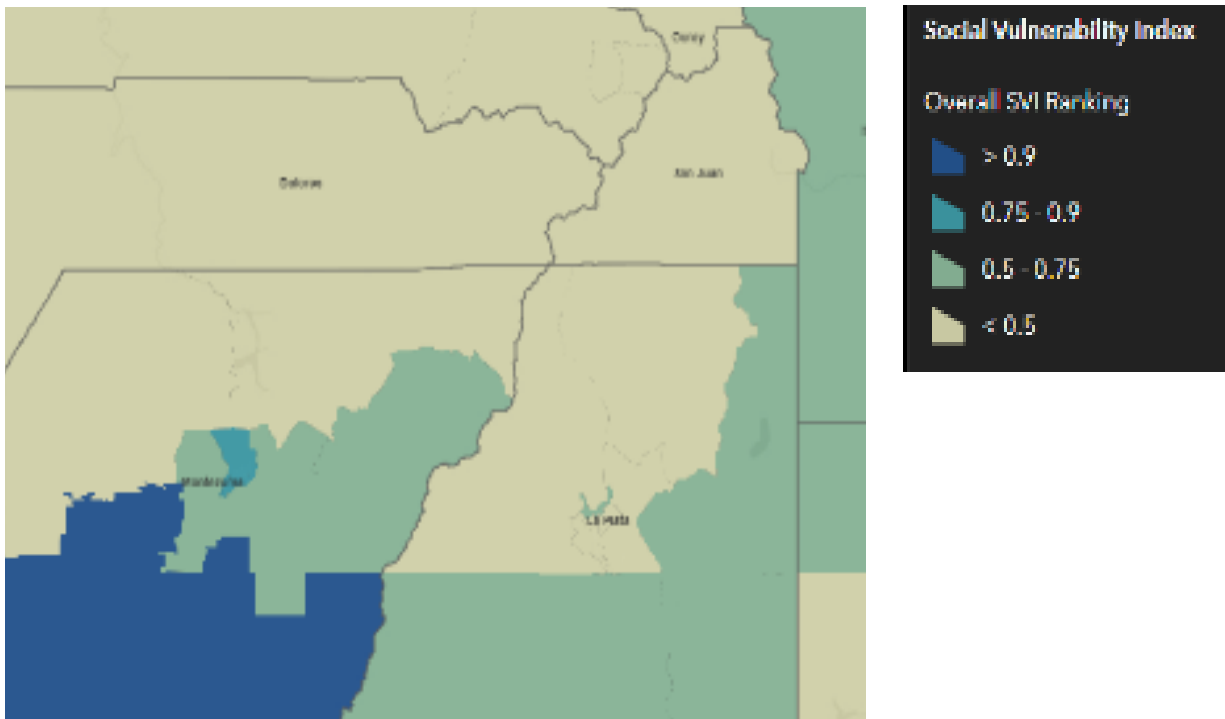
¹⁰ Esri Community Profile, Montezuma County, 2022 Estimates

¹¹ Esri Community Profile, Dolores County, 2022 Estimates

A community's Social Vulnerability Index score may provide insight as to its ability to weather future economic, environmental, and social and public health threats. However, context is important in analyzing how certain characteristics constitute an asset versus vulnerability. For example, a larger population of older adults may increase vulnerability ratings, given that this population is more likely to experience disproportionate, adverse impacts to certain conditions if appropriate resources and services are not available during normal times or in times of an emergency. However, this demographic is also an important community asset from a familial and social perspective and, in Dolores County, Montezuma County, and other locales across Colorado, an important economic driver.

A screenshot of the Social Vulnerability Index mapping tool, zoomed in on the region, is shown below. The closer to 1 (dark blue), the more vulnerable an area is considered to be. **The Montezuma Region's most vulnerable areas are in the southern portions, which include the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. The City of Cortez is also identified as an area with relatively high risk.**

- In addition to socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including educational attainment and poverty, the Montezuma region contains areas with relatively high *household composition* vulnerability scores. Factors that contribute to household composition vulnerability metric include areas with a larger percentage of people with a disability, who are 65+ years of age, or who are younger than 17.
- The *minority/language vulnerability* indicator can help identify populations that may need additional cultural or language services in order to access emergency services, community resources, healthcare, and more. According to the data, parts of the Montezuma region, including Cortez and on the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe reservation, where the percent of the population that speaks English less than well is below the state average.



Civic Capacity Index

The CSU Extension office conducted a survey across Colorado counties to assess civic capacity and enable community driven change. The Civic Capacity Index is a research-based measure of a community's ability to respond to challenges and can give us an understanding of how people adapt to crises such as a pandemic. There are six categories which include Leadership, Inclusion, Institutions, Civic Culture, Coalitions, and Collaborations. Montezuma County rated within the "Suffering" and "Struggling" range for nearly all categories of its recent Civic Capacity Index report. The "inclusion" category was among the lowest rated categories.

Key Findings & Implications

Basic Infrastructure Gaps

- **Montezuma and Dolores counties are among the Colorado counties with the lowest percent of households with broadband internet.**¹² Parts of the region, including tribal communities, are particularly impacted, and these disparities have implications for economic competitiveness and social equity. Reliable internet access improves social connectivity, key to resilience for families and communities, and it can facilitate the delivery of healthcare services and public safety, and increase access to education and job opportunities. There are many partners mobilizing to improve broadband access and continued collaboration is needed, particularly to leverage upcoming federal and state funds.
- **The region's transportation infrastructure limitations have impacts on workforce mobility, access to services, and capacity for commerce (i.e., getting products to market).** Limited public transit services and reliance on private vehicles is an ongoing challenge for the rural region, especially for UMUT members. Moreover, the region lacks rail infrastructure or access to a major interstate. The airport has very limited capacity.
- **There are gaps in the region's water delivery infrastructure,** which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. The water supply issue is exacerbated by extreme drought, a long history of water rights challenges, aging delivery and storage infrastructure, and competing uses.

Housing Affordability and Attainability

"Affordable housing, in addition to being crucial for families who need lower cost housing, has been tied to several other indicators of health and resilience. It can reduce stresses on health, promote better performance in

¹² 69% Montezuma County, 64% Dolores County households have broadband access compared to 93% statewide. Colorado [Resiliency Dashboard](#).

school for kids, and boost local economic vitality and growth. Research shows that people of color are disproportionately affected by lack of affordable housing.”

- **The region is experiencing a crisis of housing affordability and availability.**
 - During the COVID-19 pandemic, **Montezuma County experienced the second most drastic median home price increase in the state**, between 2019-2021.¹³
 - **While cost of living is considered low compared to other parts of the state and nation, half of all renters in Southwest Colorado¹⁴ are considered “housing cost burdened.”¹⁵** Incomes have significantly lagged behind housing price increases, while the average cost of rent has risen.
 - **The region’s housing supply has been squeezed by buyers seeking second homes during the pandemic, as well as an increase in unoccupied seasonal homes.** In Dolores County, there has been a 21% increase in unoccupied seasonal units.
- **More housing is needed to accommodate lower- and middle-income workers and earners, seniors, non-traditional households, and people experiencing homelessness.¹⁶**
 - **The supply of workforce housing options is inadequate.** In Dolores County, nearly all of the housing units are single-family, with few apartments. This is also true for Montezuma County, although to a slightly lesser extent. This has implications for the ability to accommodate workers.
 - **The current supply of public affordable housing cannot keep up with demand.** This has been felt by the Montezuma County Housing Authority, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and many other local housing providers.
- **One of the paramount challenges for rural areas like the Montezuma region is attracting housing developers to build a relatively small number of units** (economies of scale), all while navigating somewhat complicated regulatory codes and approval processes. Moreover, there are high costs of building materials, increasing land costs, and barriers to the provision of ground level infrastructure (water and sewer) and utilities that have impacted the supply of new housing.
- There are **limited funding resources to commit to affordable housing solutions.** Also, while there are many organizations that touch on housing, gaps in organizational capacity were identified as a challenge.¹⁷

¹³ [Denver Post article, January 2022](#)

¹⁴ Includes Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan counties

¹⁵ Households that spend 30%+ of their income on housing and utilities are commonly referred to as cost-burdened.

¹⁶ *Regional Housing Needs Assessment*, Prepared by Root Policy Center, 2021

¹⁷ See Appendix for list of key housing partners

- The lack of housing options is also a significant **barrier to recruit businesses** to move to the region and attract employees from a variety of skill levels.
- Future housing opportunities should focus on affordable, energy efficient, water conserving, healthy, and culturally appropriate options.

Economy & Business Support

“Economic development is increasingly recognized as a priority in many communities. After seeing the scale of disruption to economies during the pandemic, local governments are considering strategies to diversify and build adaptive capacity within their economies.” – 2022 Colorado Resiliency Summit

- **The region has several inherent strengths that underpin economic resilience.**
 - There has been positive economic activity over the last decade, with a resurgence of **entrepreneurial energy**, including growth in niche industries.
 - It is a **comparably affordable** place to do business compared to other parts of the state.
 - The region has a wealth of **cultural and natural amenities** that provide outdoor recreation and tourism draws, as well as a relatively high quality of life for residents.
 - Benefits from **key institutions and organizations** (educational, cultural, government), as will be discussed throughout this assessment.
- **The region has several challenges and deficiencies that can lead to weakened economic and social resilience.**
 - These challenges include a **limited availability of high-tech skilled workforce**, a limited number of large employers and **job opportunities**, a **skills mismatch** for certain industries, inadequate **childcare services**, economic volatility (see below), and as previously mentioned, limited Broadband availability.
 - **Social and environmental factors**, including drought and climate change, drug use and mental health challenges, and barriers to civic engagement, are also persistent concerns that compound economic vulnerabilities.
- **The region is characterized by economic volatility, particularly due to the Oil & Gas Industry’s boom-and-bust cycles.** Local governments have become reliant on tax revenue from oil & gas industries, an unsustainable revenue source. This underscores the importance of both diversification and the opportunities for the renewable energy sector.
- **There is a wealth of economic development and workforce organizations at the local, county, and regional level, yet “silos” and fragmentation are persistent.**

- The good news is that there is **positive momentum** to work toward breaking down those silos to foster an environment of collaboration and a **unified regional voice**.
 - Moving forward, there are opportunities to ensure prospective businesses know where to turn for **resources and assistance navigating** different permitting, business support, and financing entities – and to be intentional about providing **culturally responsive services**.
 - Cortez's new **Business Resource Center**, spearheaded by the Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce, intends to create a “one stop shop” business support location by combining services from multiple entities into one location. It also provides much-needed coworking and meeting space.
- **Inclusive growth that prioritizes home-grown businesses and economic opportunity should be a key goal: to not only drive business growth, but to be mindful of creating opportunities for everyone.** Narrowing disparities leads to a more vibrant, prosperous region and greater resiliency. There may be more opportunities to help existing locally-based businesses and entrepreneurs to scale-up to create larger scale, home-grown enterprises.
 - **Natural resources can be building blocks for economic growth in key industries.**
 - While agriculture is at risk from climate change and cultural shifts, as discussed in the section on Water & Agricultural Resources, there are opportunities for **niche food production and innovation**.
 - Expansion of **timber industry**
 - Opportunities to build upon **outdoor recreation** as a tourism driver
 - **There are a handful of industries in the region with workforce gaps**, including construction trades and healthcare. Employers find that the region’s labor pool is often limited in terms of supply of employees with skills/education/interest that match job positions.

Education & Workforce Development

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated declining high school enrollment and graduation rates.** Montezuma County districts have a lower high school completion rate at 79% compared to 83% statewide (in 2020). Student enrollment has been on the decline since before the pandemic, with a 20% decrease in Dolores and 1% decrease in Montezuma between 2009 and 2019, compared to 10% increase in region and state.¹⁸ Higher high school graduation rates have been connected to improvements in health, employment and income stability, all factors that contribute to a community’s resilience.

¹⁸ *Education in Southwest Colorado: 2020 Update, Region 9*

- **There are disparities in educational outcomes based on race and class:** In 2020, high school graduation rates among white, non-Hispanic, students were 91% and 89% in Montezuma County and Dolores County, respectively. However, these rates ranged between 67% and 80% for African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic students.¹⁹
- **Many of the region's schools are experiencing difficulty retaining teachers and educators.** Dolores and Montezuma school districts have some of the highest turnover rates in the state, and low average teacher salaries. Meanwhile, the demand for teachers and educators is expected to increase 10% growth over the next decade, statewide.²⁰
- **Initiatives that seek to increase educational attainment, workforce development, employment programs, and increased wages, and that decrease the opportunity gap** between people of color and households with limited means, should be considered.
- **More work can be done to prepare students for careers in trades (and non-degree pathways) to help meet local workforce needs.**
 - **There is still a stigma and lack of support for the trades, even though there are many high- wage, in-demand careers locally.** Efforts are needed to integrate the education system and the business community to promote career pathways that align with economic development goals.
 - **Overall, it has been difficult to retain youth in the community after they graduate from high school.** Part of the solution is to provide more employment opportunities in addition to quality-of-life benefits (relates to housing, livable wage).
 - **More work-based learning opportunities are needed.** There are great initiatives under way but there are disproportionate impacts on who participates in them.
- **There is an existing gap in healthcare workers that is projected to widen.** Healthcare is one of the fastest growing occupations in Colorado, with a 12% increase in employment demand for mental & behavioral healthcare by 2030.²¹ This need for mental and behavioral health workers is also evidenced by the community through stakeholder interviews. The workforce demands are particularly acute in rural communities like the Montezuma region, with an aging population and challenges with healthcare worker retention.

Water & Agricultural Resources

- **Persistent, severe drought is a top environmental and economic concern that has implications for the region's future on many levels.** Currently, land within Montezuma and

¹⁹ *Education in Southwest Colorado: 2020 Update, Region 9*

²⁰ *Education in Southwest Colorado: 2020 Update, Region 9*

²¹ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2021

Dolores Counties is classified as ranging from the designations of abnormally dry to extreme drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM). The region has been severely impacted by cycles of extreme drought resulting in critical water shortages. Montezuma County declared an emergency due to the drought in April 2022. Current drought conditions in Montezuma and Dolores Counties have the potential to cause over \$1.3 million in damages annually across the outdoor recreation, agricultural, and tourism sectors.²²

- **The region's water supply is challenged by persistent drought. Unused Tribal water rights, coupled with appropriate intergovernmental agreements around water rights and necessary infrastructure, can potentially supply the water that is needed for the entire region.** The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe holds approximately 16,000-acre feet of water in Lake Nighthorse in Durango, Colorado, about 60 miles from Cortez. The water is exclusively for municipal and industrial uses and can help the region supply drinking and industrial water to its population. However, the water cannot be delivered to the region without robust delivery infrastructure. Intergovernmental agreements around water rights could be a useful tool.
- **Water is a cross-cutting issue and is central to the economic, social, ecological livelihood of the region, and it requires collaborative conversations** on the inter-jurisdictional, regional, and watershed levels.
- **Critical water delivery infrastructure gaps exist, particularly for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.** The infrastructure needed to pipe water from Lake Nighthorse is complex and capital intensive, but necessary for the survival and prosperity of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, with potential mutual benefits to the region as a whole, and is therefore a high priority.
- **Water loss due to aging infrastructure and invasive species impacts an already limited water supply.** Invasive plants like Tamarisk and Russian Olive are responsible for consuming drastic amounts of water and this is problematic for a region experiencing such extreme, persistent drought. Many of the communities in the region have robust invasive species mitigation (and restoration) programs, but funding and manpower remains a challenge.
- **Implications for the future viability of agriculture: Agriculture is an important regional economic driver that is experiencing many challenges.** Limitations and gaps include: water supply, infrastructure, growing season, land affordability, infrastructure, interest of next generation in farming. Especially with inflation, and loss of revenue from drought, all costs continue to rise.
- **Much of Dolores and Montezuma Counties exist within areas classified as having a moderate to very high risk of wildfire.** It is estimated that these risks pose up to \$9.4 million in

²² These damages increase by almost 2x when factoring in projections for increased temperatures and decreased precipitation due to climate change.

potential damages. A holistic, watershed-scale is needed and is already occurring through initiatives like the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI).

Mental & Behavioral Health

- The Montezuma region is facing a number of **challenges related to the rise in people experiencing mental and behavioral health issues.**
 - **There has been a rise in substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental distress in the region,** particularly since 2019.²³ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the region's mental and behavioral health challenges.
 - **The region continues to struggle with opioid overdose deaths.** Opioids account for 2 in 3 overdose deaths in Colorado, with fentanyl being the primary driver.²⁴ This crisis has severely impacted communities across the region, tribal and non-tribal alike. Additional information about the recent opioid settlement funding can be found in the appendix.
 - **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated poor mental health and social isolation, particularly among youth.** There is evidence of increased anxiety, depression for youth since the beginning of the pandemic.²⁵ A common theme from Roadmaps engagement was that investing in the well-being of youth, and to ensure they're equipped to cope in healthy ways and have ample opportunities, is an imperative.
- **There is a need for more culturally responsive mental and behavioral healthcare, including peer support providers.**
 - There is a shortage of culturally responsive care providers and barriers to accessing care, particularly among Ute Mountain Ute Tribal members.
 - Ute Mountain and other American Indian/Alaska Native communities in the region have higher ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) scores among their populations. ACE is linked to historical trauma and intergenerational adversity, and limited access to resources/supports including getting basic needs met. Individuals with higher ACE scores may be at greater risk for mental illness, drug use, incarceration lower economic opportunities, and suicide, later in life.
- **As previously stated, the region's mental healthcare system suffers from limited financial resources, workforce shortages, and inter-organizational collaboration challenges.**

²³ Montezuma County Police data from 2022 Community Intervention Program grant application

²⁴ Colorado Health Institute, 2021

²⁵According to CDC data on youth mental health during the covid pandemic, 44% of HS students in the US reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year [2021]. (CDC report March 2022).

- Not unlike other rural communities, the region has **limited funding resources** and **organizational capacity** for treatment facilities, staffing, and other needed interventions.
- **The region benefits from a handful of organizations that are working collaboratively and in innovative ways, including: Team Up United Way, Axis Health, Pinon Project, Mógúán Mental Health Center, and others.** Increased collaboration will be needed in order to work toward providing culturally responsive care and to address mental health workforce gaps.
- Additional efforts to expand **public awareness of existing services** are needed.
- **The region also benefits from key opportunities, assets, and recent success stories, including the Community Intervention Program (CIT).**
 - **The Community Intervention Program is a Montezuma County and Axis Health Systems-led co-responder initiative** that pairs an EMT and behavioral health specialist to respond to non-criminal crises such as mental health, homelessness support, intoxication or substance use concerns, and welfare checks.
 - Both law enforcement and social services providers are shifting toward trauma-informed treatment and harm reduction interventions, as well as culturally-competent care. There are likely opportunities to continue to improve and expand upon this work.
 - These initiatives will require more sustained funding.
- **Mental and behavioral health outcomes will not drastically improve unless the community also addresses underlying social issues,** namely the ability for all people to reliably access basic needs (food, housing, transportation) and community and personal support. For example, having stable housing is key to long-term success is getting folks sober and stable, with peer support.

IV. Goals & Objectives

This section outlines the Montezuma Regional Community Team’s shared goals and key objectives. The Montezuma Regional Team’s goal areas align with the state Resiliency priorities. More detailed action and implementation recommendations can be found in the [Strategies Matrix](#) (and the [Action Plans](#)).

Six Key Goals

1. **Improve business support systems**
2. **Retain, attract, and expand industry**
3. **Enhance education & workforce development opportunities**
4. **Promote sustainable use of water and agricultural resources**
5. **Expand housing choice and affordability**
6. **Address mental & behavioral health challenges**

Objectives

Prioritization methodology

Objectives and strategies were evaluated prioritized based on alignment with resiliency criteria, resources available for implementation, and degree of interest from community stakeholders as demonstrated through this planning process so far. Strategies were analyzed using the nine resilience criteria listed in the [Resiliency Prioritization Criteria](#) to ensure that they are future-proof and build the resiliency of the region, and include measurable metrics that allow for the region to assess/track strategic actions.

Nine Resilience Criteria:



More information can be found in the Strategies Matrix and action plans. Recommended actions are also provided in both the matrix and action plan documents.

Resiliency Priorities

“Key Resilience Issues” are used to frame how the region will become more resilient to future shocks and stressors. More information about how these key issues guide the work of the Colorado Resiliency Office is explained in the [Colorado Resilience Framework](#) and in the [RoadMaps StoryMap](#).



Future-Ready Economy & Workforce (EW)

Fortify Colorado’s workforce to support a future-ready, regenerative, circular economy.



Climate & Natural Hazard Resiliency (CN)

Reduce Colorado’s risk from climate change and natural hazards through integrated land use, ecosystem, and natural resource planning, management, and investment.



Building & Infrastructure Sustainability (BI)

Reimagine and modernize Colorado’s built environment to be both climate and hazard resilient and environmentally sustainable.



Agriculture & Food Security (AF)

Cultivate a robust state and local food system – from agriculture to distribution and consumption.



Housing Attainability (HA)

Increase the supply of attainable housing throughout Colorado, including affordable housing options for workforce populations and those who most experience marginalizing.



Community Capacity (CC)

Empower and support Colorado communities to improve local resilience, equity, and capacity.

Priority Objectives and Strategies

Ten objectives and corresponding strategies that rose to the top in terms of priority are summarized in the outline below. Objectives are organized by the state Resiliency priority area that they most align with.

Climate and Natural Hazard Resilience

1. Coordinate strategic investments in water delivery and storage infrastructure

Key Strategies

1. **Maintain partnerships between local governments and tribal entities around mutually beneficial water infrastructure investments**
2. **Identify funding for water delivery infrastructure from Lake Nighthorse to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe**
3. **Preserve existing water supplies through riparian restoration efforts (phreatophyte and invasive species mitigation)**
4. **Prioritize canal upgrades to reduce water loss**
5. **Improve efficiencies in water access and storage**

Agriculture & Food Security

2. Increase water efficient, drought-tolerant, and regenerative farming practices

Key Strategies

1. **Connect farmers and ranchers to grant opportunities and resources for drought-related and sustainable agriculture**
2. **Expand the availability and use of compost and cover crops**
3. **Improve agricultural water efficiency**

3. Expand the market potential of locally-grown and processed food products, while increasing food security and food access for local residents

Key Strategies

1. **Increase participation in regional food hub and distribution networks**
2. **Pursue the development of value-added food processing facilities**
3. **Make strategic investments in projects that enhance food security and access**

Future-Ready Economy & Workforce

4. Expand Broadband internet access

Key Strategy

1. **Initiate a coordinated effort to prepare the region for new broadband infrastructure funding opportunities**

5. Support career pathways, hands-on learning opportunities, and workforce programs that align with economic development goals

Key Strategies

1. **Convene schools, businesses, and workforce development partners to coordinate around local workforce needs and opportunities**
2. **Create more tailored high school curriculum and hands-on learning opportunities, particularly for in-demand careers like construction, natural resources, and healthcare**
3. **Elevate "Educonomy" and trades as viable and celebrated career pathways**
4. **Reduce barriers to participation in workforce development and higher education programs (e.g., transportation, financial access)**

6. Improve business support for existing and prospective businesses & entrepreneurs

Key Strategies

1. **Provide culturally responsive business support services to meet the diverse needs of communities.**
2. **Offer more hands-on, in-person business support services**
3. **Encourage more local businesses to have an online presence and improve technological literacy**
4. **Facilitate peer-to-peer and entrepreneurial networks**

Housing Attainability

7. Increase intra-governmental collaboration to access housing incentives and explore innovative financing mechanisms

Key Strategies

1. **Organize regionally to co-apply for state and federal housing funds (leveraging the new Region 9 Broadband & Housing Coordinator position)**

2. Consider land banking of public and other property to facilitate more housing development
3. Consider utilizing special districts (i.e., metropolitan districts, improvement districts) to finance infrastructure to help facilitate more housing development
4. Create additional funds to support workforce housing by taxing short-term rentals (STRs)

8. Create an adequate supply of [new] workforce and prefabricated housing

Key Strategies

1. Balance the supply of workforce housing with short-term rentals (STRs)
2. Promote Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) throughout the region
3. Build more prefabricated homes in the region
4. Develop workforce housing communities through deed restricted development
5. Allow more multi-unit land uses (i.e., townhouses, duplex, triplex, in residential areas- multi-family in commercial areas)

Community Capacity

9. Improve collaboration among the region's mental and behavioral health providers to better address workforce and service gaps

Key Strategies

1. Convene care providers in the region to address gaps in health services.
2. Recruit, train, and nurture mental and behavioral healthcare workers and peer specialists to address critical shortage
3. Enhance / sustain existing crisis intervention programs, and identify sustainable, long-term funding for the new Community Intervention Program
4. Identify collaborative opportunities with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe to support crisis response activities on tribal lands and across tribal and non-tribal jurisdictions

10. Improve youth mental & behavioral health outcomes

Key Strategies

1. Support mental and behavioral health skills development among youth through the schools

Other Objectives

11. Encourage a new generation of farmers and food suppliers

- a. Increase access to affordable farmland
- b. Expand agricultural curriculum and provide more opportunities for hands-on farming
- c. Retain Montezuma and Dolores County land in active farming

12. Support existing inter-region and inter-state water coalitions to support watersheds

- a. Continue participation in regional efforts to promote forest and watershed health

13. Employ a collaborative approach to industrial recruitment

- a. Collaborate on a strategy for industry recruitment
- b. Consider forming an economic development alliance or EDC (Montezuma County)
- c. Support the existing timber industry and coordinate regionally to attract related enterprises, including home manufacturers
- d. Create a cohesive regional marketing campaign to promote economic development

14. Increase the supply of publicly-funded affordable housing

- a. Expand capacity of housing for people experiencing homelessness

15. Expand access to funding and resources to upgrade existing homes

- a. Establish a Revolving Loan Fund to help rehab and repair existing homes
- b. Invest in housing improvements for health, safety, and energy efficiency

16. Equip community members and organizations to work collaboratively to solve local problems

- a. Implement Roadmaps Strategies through civic engagement and collaboration

17. Meet the needs of drug, alcohol, and mental health in-patient treatment and supportive recovery housing, and ensure adequate provision of jail-based resources

18. Ensure the region's demand for additional childcare is met.

V. Implementation

As discussed in the previous chapter, the plan’s objectives, strategies, and actions were developed based on the existing conditions analysis and information gathered during the topic-based workshops, alignment with resiliency criteria, and further informed by best practice research. A **strategies matrix** and **ten individual action plans** were created to facilitate implementation. These documents were developed by the consultant team in conjunction with and vetted by the Team Leads, and Regional Community Team participants were given an opportunity to review and comment. The action plans are supplemental to the strategies matrix, providing additional detail and implementation approaches for ten key objectives.²⁶

Strategies Matrix

A strategies matrix was developed to catalog, prioritize, and detail each of the Montezuma Roadmap plan’s objectives, strategies, and actions into a single framework. The spreadsheet contains five tabs corresponding to the resiliency issues most relevant to the Montezuma region. A screenshot of one of the five tabs in the strategies matrix is shown below. The full matrix is located here: [STRATEGIES MATRIX](#).

Multiple strategies exist under each objective within a given tab, and each strategy is followed by one or more action items. Information contained in the columns includes details related to an action’s importance and relevance, timeline, and baseline metrics, along with suggested lead and supporting partners. Available resources are also included for reference, including potential funding sources and best practices. For the ten starred objectives, an even greater amount of detail related to suggested implementation tactics can be found in that objective’s corresponding action plan (see page 29).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Key Resilience Issue: FUTURE-READY ECONOMY & WORKFORCE							
Objectives, Strategies and 'Actions' (listed below Strategies)	Why it Matters	Lead(s)	Supporting Partner(s)	Resources	Baseline metric or progress	Timeline	
Objective: Expand Broadband Internet access							
Strategy: Initiate a coordinated effort to prepare the region for new broadband infrastructure funding opportunities							
Hire an individual to coordinate regional broadband mobilization to take advantage of new rural broadband infrastructure funding; begin to conduct community outreach needed to identify key projects - COMPLETE	Relationship building > grant writing skills Increase eligibility for funding. \$700 million+ in rural broadband infrastructure funds may be available over the next few years.	Region 9 COG; Region 9 Broadband Coordinator (Region 9 housing + broadband project manager)	County and municipal leaders, UMUT representatives, telecom providers; CO Broadband Office, SW CO Regional Broadband Summit attendees	Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Acts (IIJA) programs: Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) - available 2024; State Digital Equity Grant Program; Middle Mile Grant Program; Tribal Connectivity Technical Amendments	Position filled # community engagements	Short	
Work to identify 3-4 key broadband projects within Montezuma and Dolores counties (including UMUT jurisdictions) to prioritize in the first several years	Competitive communities are working collaboratively to identify key last-mile connection projects	Region 9 housing + broadband project manager		ARPA Capital Projects Funds via IJA, applications open early 2023. ARPA funds can match EIAF "middle mile" funding	3-4 priority projects identified	Short	
Continue to refine the regional broadband plan to guide the installation of remaining last- and middle-mile connections	Get closer to closing the digital equity gap	Region 9 housing + broadband project manager		Broadband Deployment Board is creating new streamlined grant process. CO Broadband Strategic Plan expected late 2022	miles of new broadband fiber installed # new households with access or percentage of households with internet subscriptions	Med-Long	
Objective: Support career pathways, hands-on learning opportunities, workforce development programs that align with economic development goals							
Strategy: Convene schools, businesses, and workforce development partners to coordinate around local workforce needs and opportunities							
Start convening "sector partnership" meetings for industry and education representatives to talk about workforce needs - Quick Win	Stay up to date on workforce needs (e.g., "need more certifications rather than degrees") to help educators guide students Opportunities to tailor curriculum and work-based learning experiences so they align with community needs. PCC can create new curriculum based on local	Community Career Development Coalition grant-funded staff coordinator (Pagosa Springs Chamber is the fiscal sponsor) Montezuma Community Collective?	Industry leaders, high school superintendents and educators, economic development entities, Cortez Workforce Development Homegrown Talent Initiative, Pueblo Community College (PCC) Southwest Campus, Southwest	Economic Recovery Corps program, Colorado Workforce Development Council, Community Career Development Coalition, Lora Colorado, LOR would like to fund a facilitator to run it (food, space, etc.) Rural coaction grants?	Start with small, informal gatherings to gauge interest Homegrown Talent Initiative's career pathways refined	Short	

²⁶ See previous chapter for additional background about the ten key objectives were prioritized.

Action Plans

In addition to the strategies matrix, recommended strategies and actions for ten key objectives are outlined in a more accessible format in a series of action plans. These templates can be utilized, and modified, by the local implementation partners moving forward. See links to individual action plans below. If the Regional Community Team decides that other objectives or strategies need to be included, additional action plans can be created or swapped out.

- 1. Coordinate strategic investments in water delivery and storage infrastructure**
 - a. [Objective 1 Action Plan](#)
- 2. Increase water efficient, drought-tolerant, and regenerative farming practices**
 - a. [Objective 2 Action Plan](#)
- 3. Expand the market potential of locally-grown and processed food products, while increasing food security and food access for local residents**
 - a. [Objective 3 Action Plan](#)
- 4. Expand Broadband internet access**
 - a. [Objective 4 Action Plan](#)
- 5. Support career pathways, hands-on learning opportunities, and workforce programs that align with economic development goals**
 - a. [Objective 5 Action Plan](#)
- 6. Improve business support for existing and prospective businesses & entrepreneurs**
 - a. [Objective 6 Action Plan](#)
- 7. Increase intra-governmental collaboration to access housing incentives and explore innovative financing mechanisms**
 - a. [Objective 7 Action Plan](#)
- 8. Create an adequate supply of workforce (and prefabricated) housing**
 - a. [Objective 8 Action Plan](#)
- 9. Improve collaboration among the region's mental and behavioral health providers to better address workforce and service gaps**
 - a. [Objective 9 Action Plan](#)

10. Improve youth mental & behavioral health outcomes, and community engagement

a. [Objective 10 Action Plan](#)

Montezuma Community Collective

The Montezuma Regional Team has formed the Montezuma Community Collective (MCC) as the vehicle to carry out the implementation of the Montezuma Community Roadmaps Plan. MCC is a collaboration of local and regional entities and community members that encourages people to take an active role in the implementation of identified projects. MCC will leverage collaborative relationships that blend the diverse skills and talents of stakeholders and the voices of community members to solve complex issues and reduce duplicative efforts. Five action-orientated teams will be formed to carry out action plans. . Based on Priority Objectives and Strategies included in the Roadmap Plan, the five Action Teams will include; workforce and education, drought mitigation and agriculture, housing and transportation, community health, and business and entrepreneurship. To encourage and prepare community leaders to take an active role in the coalition, MCC has partnered with Montezuma Leadership Network. The Montezuma Leadership Network will provide a pathway for growth through leadership training, development, and peer networking; further building local capacity so the community can better help itself in the long term. MCC will equip members to sustain the ongoing work of Action Teams by creating a more efficient and effective connection to resources, funding, and support.

APPENDIX

Contents

- A. Regional Team Participants + Workshop Attendee list**
- B. Montezuma Roadmap Regional Team Community Engagement & EDI Plan**
- C. Comprehensive List of Resources Reviewed**
- D. Background Research By Topic Area**
- E. Links to Workshop Meeting Notes & Recordings, Strategies Matrix, and Action Plans**

A. Regional Team Participants & Workshop Attendees

Business Support Systems (March 10, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Chad Wheelus	Homegrown Talent Coordinator	M-CHS and RE-1 School District
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
Drew Sanders	City Manager	City of Cortez
Greg Felsen	Director	CSU Extension Montezuma County
Heather Otter	Project Manager	Region 9
Jodi Jahrling	Director Marketing/Events	United Way of Southwest CO
Lyneth Fuller	Employment Specialist	CDLE Workforce Center - Cortez
Mary Shepherd	Executive Director	Southwest Colorado SBDC
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachael Marchbanks	Economic Coordinator, Grant-writer	Town of Mancos
Rachel Medina	GIS (current City of Cortez Mayor)	Montezuma County
Rick Smith	General Services Director	City of Cortez
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County
Steve Garchar	County Commissioner	Dolores County
Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
State Partners Attending		
Karen Wainscott	EDA Rural Program Manager	OEDIT
Kat Papenbrock	Western Rural Rep.	OEDIT
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA

Attracting & Expanding Industry (March 28, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Bonnie Loving	County Noxious Weed Manager	Montezuma County
Chad Wheelus	Homegrown Talent Coordinator	M-CHS and RE-1 School District
Chauncey McCarthy	Town Manager	Town of Rico
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
Don Haley	Planning Director	Montezuma County
Doug Roth	GIS Manager	Montezuma County
Drew Sanders	City Manager	City of Cortez
James Dietrich	Natural Resources Specialist	Montezuma County
Jane Duncan	Administrative Assistance	Montezuma County
Jodi Jahrling	Director Marketing/Events	United Way of Southwest CO
Jon Brooks	Communications & Events	City of Cortez
Justin Vasterling	General Manager	Holiday Inn Mesa Verde-Cortez
Kendra Cook	Director	Dove Creek Chamber of Commerce
Laura Lewis Marchino	Executive Director	Region 9
Lyneth Fuller	Employment Specialist	CDLE Workforce Center - Cortez
Mel Jarmon	Water stakeholder	Montezuma County
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Nicki Green	Legal Counsel	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachel Medina	(current City of Cortez Mayor)	Montezuma County
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County
Steve Garchar	County Commissioner	Dolores County
Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
State Partners Attending		
Karen Wainscott	EDA Rural Program Manager	OEDIT
Kat Papenbrock	Western Rural Opportunity Rep.	OEDIT
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA
Patrick Rondinelli	Southwest Regional Manager	DOLA
Ray Lucero	Regional Director	CDLE

Water & Agricultural Resources (April 14, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
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Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Abe Rosenberg	Local Foods Coordinator	SLV Local Foods Coalition
Brian Peckins	Public Works Director	City of Cortez
Chauncey McCarthy	Town Manager	Town of Rico
Chris Burkett	Grants & Special Projects	City of Cortez
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
David Stoner	Natural Resource Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Don Haley	Planning Director	Montezuma County
Doug Roth	GIS Manager	Montezuma County
Greg Felsen	Director	CSU Extension Montezuma County
Heather Houk	Agriculture Program Coordinator	Pueblo Community College SW Campus
Heather Otter	Econ. Dev. Project Manager	Region 9
James Dietrich	Natural Resources Specialist	Montezuma County
Jane Duncan	Administrative Assistance	Montezuma County
Jodi Jahrling	Director Marketing/Events	United Way of Southwest CO
Ken Curtis	General Manager	Dolores Water Conservancy District
Laurie Hall	Director	Montezuma Food Coalition
Lisa Yellow Feather	Tribal Water Attorney	Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Lyneth Fuller	Employment Specialist	CDLE Workforce Center - Cortez
Mary Shepherd	Executive Director	Southwest Colorado SBDC
Mike Preston	UMUT Water Consultant	President Enterprise Board; RMRI rep.
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachael Marchbanks	Dir. of Community & Economic Dev.	City of Cortez
Rachel Landis	Director	Good Food Collective
Rachel Medina	(current City of Cortez Mayor)	Montezuma County
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County
Simon Martinez	General Manager, Farm & Ranch	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
State Partners Attending		
Karen Wainscott	EDA Rural Program Manager	OEDIT
Kat Papenbrock	Western Rural Rep.	OEDIT
Kat Weismiller	Deputy Section Chief of Water Supply Planning	Colorado Water Conservation Board, DNR
Kristen Boysen	Drought & Climate Specialist	CO Dept of Agriculture
Les Owen	Director	Conservation Services Division, CDA

Marty Robbins	Water Commissioner	CO Division of Water Resources, Division 7
Megan O'Grady	Climate Adaptation Specialist	Colorado Water Conservation Board
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA
Rob Genualdi	Division Engineer	CO Division of Water Resources
Russ Sands	Water Supply Planning	Colorado Water Conservation Board
Sam Stein	Drought Specialist	Colorado Water Conservation Board

Education & Workforce Development (April 29, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Arline Yazzie	County Public Health	Montezuma County
Brian Peckins	Public Works Director	City of Cortez
Chad Wheelus	M-CHS HTI Coordinator	Homegrown Talent Initiative
Chauncey McCarthy	Town Manager	Town of Rico
Chris Burkett	Grants & Special Projects	City of Cortez
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
Don Haley	Planning Director	Montezuma County
Doug Roth	GIS Manager	Montezuma County
Dr. Sam Dosumo	Executive Dean	Pueblo Community College SW Campus
Elise Savastano	Director of Operations	United Way of SW Colorado
Glenn May	Asst. Director of Higher Education	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Greg Felsen	Director	CSU Extension Montezuma County
Haley Leonard Saunders	Director of Public Relations	Axis Health System
Heather Otter	Project Manager	Region 9
James Dietrich	Natural Resources Specialist	Montezuma County
Jane Duncan	Administrative Assistance	Montezuma County
Jeff Willson	Director K-12 Education	UMUT/Adult Education Instructor
Jessica Thurman	Economic Dev. Coordinator	Montezuma County
Jodi Jahrling	Director Marketing/Events	United Way of Southwest CO
Lucia Bueno-Valdez	Colorado Community Response	The Pinon Project
Lyneth Fuller	Employment Specialist	CDLE Workforce Center - Cortez
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachael Marchbanks	Dir. of Community & Economic Dev.	City of Cortez
Rachel Medina	(current City of Cortez Mayor)	Montezuma County
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County

Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
Tricia Gibson	Treasurer	Town of Dolores
State Partners Attending		
Dr. Roberto Montoya	Chief Ed. Equity Officer	CDHE
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA
Karen Wainscott	EDA Rural Program Manager	OEDIT
Kat Papenbrock	Western Rural Rep.	OEDIT

Housing Choice & Affordability (May 26, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Arline Yazzie	County Public Health	Montezuma County
Brian Peckins	Public Works Director	City of Cortez
Chad Wheelus	Homegrown Talent Coordinator	M-CHS and RE-1 School District
Chauncey McCarthy	Town Manager	Town of Rico
Chris Burkett	Grants & Special Projects	City of Cortez
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
Don Haley	Planning Director	Montezuma County
Doug Roth	GIS Manager	Montezuma County
Elise Savastano	Director of Operations	United Way of SW Colorado
Glenn May	Asst. Director of Higher Education	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Greg Felsen	Director	CSU Extension Montezuma County
Haley Leonard Saunders	Director of Public Relations	Axis Health System
Heather Otter	Project Manager	Region 9
James Dietrich	Natural Resources Specialist	Montezuma County
Jane Duncan	Administrative Assistance	Montezuma County
Jessica Thurman	Economic Dev. Coordinator	Montezuma County
Kellie Willis	Director	Pinon Project
Lisa Bloomquist	Executive Director	Homes Fund
Lucia Bueno-Valdez	Colorado Community Response	The Pinon Project
Lyneth Fuller	Employment Specialist	Cortez Workforce Center
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachael Marchbanks	Economic Coordinator, Grant-writer	Town of Mancos
Rachel Medina	(current City of Cortez Mayor)	Montezuma County
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County

Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
Tricia Gibson	Treasurer	Town of Dolores
Valeria Root	Housing Authority	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
State Partners Attending		
Olivia Cook	Housing Development Specialist	DOLA
KC McFerson	Senior Planner	DOLA
Dr. Roberto Montoya	Chief Ed. Equity Officer	CDHE
Andy Hill	Program Director	DOLA
Chris Lopez	Community Relationship Manager	CHFA
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA

Mental & Behavioral Health (June 23, 2022)

Name	Title	Organization
Montezuma Regional Community Team & Additional Participants		
Caitlin DeCrow	Quality Project Navigator	Southwest Health System
Chad Wheelus	Homegrown Talent Coordinator	M-CHS and RE-1 School District
Chauncey McCarthy	Town Manager	Town of Rico
Chris Burkett	Grants & Special Projects	City of Cortez
Colton Black	Executive Director	Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
DeAnne House	Móguán Mental Health Center	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Don Haley	Planning Director	Montezuma County
Doug Roth	GIS Manager	Montezuma County
Emily Huminski	Coordinator	Team UP United Way
Greg Felsen	Director	CSU Extension Montezuma County
Haley Leonard Saunders	Director of Public Relations	Axis Health System
Heather Otter	Project Manager	Region 9
Imo Succo	Programs Manager	SW AHEC
James Dietrich	Natural Resources Specialist	Montezuma County
Jane Duncan	Administrative Assistance	Montezuma County
Jay Wood	Director	Southwest Health System
Jessica Thurman	Economic Dev. Coordinator	Montezuma County
Justin Vasterling	General Manager	Holiday Inn Mesa Verde-Cortez
Nichole Glaser	Grant-writer	Montezuma County
Peter Ortego	Department of Justice Director	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Rachael Marchbanks	Economic Coordinator, Grant-writer	Town of Mancos
Shak Powers	County Administrator	Montezuma County

Susan Lisak	Executive Director	Dolores Chamber of Commerce
Tiffany Nichols	EFL Coach/ Executive Director	Tails of Transformation
Trent Woods	EMS Technician	Southwest Health System
State Partners Attending		
Jennifer Lewis	Interagency Tribal Liaison	Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs
Morgan Ferris	Recovery Project Manager	DOLA
Shelly Solopow	Tribal Liaison	CDHS
Steph Salkin	Project Manager	Office of Behavioral Health

B. Montezuma Roadmap Community Engagement & EDI Plan

The Community Engagement and EDI Plan can be found [here on the Google Drive](#).

C. List of Resources Reviewed

Local & Regional Studies and Background Materials

- *Civic Capacity and Community Resilience Report: Montezuma County*, 2021. CSU Office of Engagement and Extension.
- *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment*. Ute Climate Change Program, 2015.
- *Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study*
- *Education in Southwest Colorado: 2020 Update*. Region 9 Economic Development District, 2020.
- *Montezuma County CDAP (Community Development Action Plan)*, 2019
- *Montezuma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan*, 2020
- *Montezuma County Community Needs Assessment Report*. Colorado State University Extension, 2021.
- Montezuma County Economic Development department materials, including business park development, housing data and projects, infrastructure, incentives, website and prospectus
- *Núchíú Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Climate Action Plan*, 2020. A Collaboration of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Climate Change Adaptation Planning Working Group and Colorado State University. (A summary of this plan can be found [here](#)).
- *Region 9 CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy)*. Region 9 Economic Development District, 2021.
- *Regional Housing Needs Assessment*, Prepared by Root Policy Center, 2021

- *Southwest Basin Implementation Plan*. Colorado Water Conservation Board, January 2022
- *The Roadmap to Regional Connectivity: Southwest Colorado Local Food Hub-to-Node Connectivity Project*, April 2022 Draft.

Best Practices and State Resources

- *Annual Higher Education Return on Investment Report*. CDHE, 2021.
- *Bridging the Talent Gap*
- *Colorado Resiliency Playbook*. Colorado Resiliency Office, 2019.
- *Colorado Resiliency Virtual Summit: Transformation Recovery (Summaries and Takeaways)*. Colorado Resiliency Office, 2022.
- *Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium Labor Market Update*. Presentation by Mark Hoblitzell, Colorado Workforce Center. Spring 2022.
- *Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*. Colorado Workforce Development Council, 2021
- *Colorado Water Plan*. Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023 Draft.
- *Community Inclusion in Colorado: Indicator and Resources Description*. CDPHE, 2018.
- IJA Summit meeting notes (July 2022)
- *Reimagining Native Food Economies*. Native American Agriculture Fund, 2021.
- *Report on Educational Equity: Creating a Colorado for All*. Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2020.
- *The Behavioral Health Workforce in Rural America: Development: A National Recruitment Strategy*. CHRT, February 2020.
- *Ten Strategies for Climate Resilience in the Colorado River Basin*. Martin & McCoy and Culp & Kelly LLP (2021).

Articles

- "A look into Kwiyyagat Community Academy's first year." The Journal, Kala Parkinson. April 9, 2022.
- "Adjusting for drought requires innovation, planning: Mancos Valley takes lesson from dry years to improve its irrigation system." The Journal, Jim Mimiaga. April 1, 2021.
- "Construction trades program will address workforce needs." Becky Atnip, Pueblo Community College. March 31, 2022.
- "Pandemic pushed Colorado home prices to record highs, listings to record lows — especially in high country," January 30, 2022, Denver Post.
- "Political Divisions in Cortez, Colorado, Got So Bitter the Mayor Needed a Mediator." Wall Street Journal, September 26, 2021.
- "Tribes assert water rights on Colorado River Basin." The Journal, Jim Mimiaga. April 7, 2021.
- "Ute Mountain Ute Tribe ramps up housing plans: Tribe lacks 200 homes; issue a priority after impacts from pandemic. The Journal, Jim Mimiaga. May 3, 2022
- "Water seminar asks what prolonged drought means for Southwest Colorado." The Journal, Jim Mimiaga. April 1, 2021.

D. Background Research

This section, *Appendix D. Background Research*, is a compilation of data and key findings that were highlighted in *III. Community Assessment*, in addition to further supporting research.

Demographics

- According to the 2020 Census, Montezuma County (pop. 25,849) grew at a rate of 1.2% between 2010 and 2022. Dolores County (pop. 1,844) grew by 12.7% over the same period.
- The population of the Montezuma Region (including Dolores County) is expected to grow at a rate of 3.6% between 2021 and 2026, to add nearly 1,000 new residents.²⁷ On par with the state average, Montezuma County's population is expected to continue to grow between 2020 and 2050, to reach over 34,000 people.
- At 12.2%, Montezuma County has the highest percentage of "American Indian Alone" out of all counties in the state (12.2%). Montezuma County's population is roughly 69.8% White Alone, 12.2% American Indian Alone, 12.0% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 4.7% two or more races, and 1.3% all other.²⁸
- Dolores County is slightly less diverse: Dolores County is 83.8% White Alone, 7.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race, and 1.5% American Indian Alone.²⁹
- Montezuma County's age distribution deviates somewhat from state averages, with a significant share of the population 55 years and over (36.8% compared to the state at 27.1%). Similarly, the population of Dolores County skews older than the statewide average, with 27.4% of the population aged 65 years and over (compared to 14.7% for the state).³⁰
- "Retirement risk" is high for the region, referring to people aging out of the workforce at high rates.³¹ However, the labor force population will likely stabilize as the 25-54 year old cohort experiences substantial growth in the coming years.
- The median household income for Montezuma County is roughly \$49,470 (in 2019), which is more than \$22K lower than the Colorado statewide median of \$72,331. Dolores County's median household income was \$45,972.³²
- Montezuma County (15%) and Dolores County (13%) have relatively high poverty rates compared to the state average (9.4%).³³
- Census tracts within Dolores and Montezuma Counties have uninsured rates ranging from 5% to 37%, which illuminates some of the financial barriers to healthcare access present in the region.

²⁷ "Economy Overview" EMSI report (from CDLE)

²⁸ US Census 2020

²⁹ US Census 2020

³⁰ 2019 American Community Survey (via State Demography Office)

³¹ "Economy Overview" EMSI report (from CDLE)

³² 2019 American Community Survey (via State Demography Office)

³³ U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), 2019

- 22% of Dolores County residents and 13% of Montezuma County residents have a disability compared with the state average of 11%.³⁴ Individuals living with disabilities may face greater barriers such as transportation and food access, education, and employment opportunities).
- In Montezuma County and Dolores County, 91% and 95% of the population aged 25+ have a high school degree or higher, respectively.³⁵
- Educational attainment is slightly lower than statewide averages: 40% of Montezuma County residents aged 25+ and 37% of Dolores County residents aged 25+ have an Associate Degree or higher, compared to an estimated 49% statewide.³⁶

Employment

- Between March 2020 and March 2021, approximately 87 (1%) jobs were lost in Montezuma County. The number of jobs in Dolores County increased by 49, or 9.8%, with the largest increases in Manufacturing, Leisure and Hospitality, and Education and Health.
- Since peak unemployment during the onset of the pandemic, employment rates have stabilized across the region to pre-pandemic levels.
- Although the county has a lower-than-average proportion of its population in prime working age (25-54 years) -- 33.8% of the civilian non-institutionalized population was in the prime working age in Montezuma in 2020 compared to the statewide average of 40.7% -- this cohort is expected to increase 19% by 2030.
- Western region employers are hiring more since before the COVID pandemic, but hiring challenges have also increased, partly due to a mismatch between skills and positions.

Top Industries

- Montezuma County's top economic drivers include: Regional Services, Retirees, Tourism, Agriculture. Largest Industries in Employment (2019): Local Government, Health Services, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services Industries with largest increase in jobs since 2009: Health Services (+319), Agriculture (+232), Education (+195)
- Dolores County's top economic drivers include: Agriculture, Retirees, Regional Services. Largest Industries in Employment (2019): Agriculture, Local Government, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services. Industries increasing in jobs (since 2009): Agriculture (+68), Local Government (+47), Accommodation and Food Services (+21).
- The industries with the largest employment *increase* since 2009 in Montezuma County include Health Services, Agriculture, and Education. In Dolores County, industries with the largest employment increase since 2009 include: Government, Accommodation & Food services, and Agriculture.
- Industry categories with the largest employment *decrease* since 2009 in Montezuma County included: Construction and Government, and Construction in Dolores County.
- 56% of Montezuma County's tax revenue comes from the oil and gas industry.

³⁴ Colorado Resiliency Office - Social Vulnerability Index

³⁵ Esri Community Profile, Montezuma County, 2022 Estimates

³⁶ Esri Community Profile, Dolores County, 2022 Estimates

Healthcare is one of the Top 5 fastest growing occupations in Colorado. There will be a 12% increase in employment demand for mental & behavioral healthcare jobs by 2030 across the state.³⁷ A strong demand for mental and behavioral health workers is also evidenced by the community, through stakeholder interviews.

There has been a growth in the timber and wood products industry regionally.³⁸ Southwest Colorado's timber industry sector could give the region a competitive advantage to attract pre-fabricated (modular) housing manufacturers. The region could potentially be a leader in modular housing manufacturing, particularly that produces affordable, energy efficient, water conserving, healthy, culturally appropriate housing options. Incentives are needed. Opportunities were identified to further expand the industry, with consideration for biofuel and pellet production, full plywood facility, cross laminated timber, upgrades for existing sawmills, paper products, cabinetry, and artisanal wood products.

Industry Recruitment

- Montezuma County may be limited by a lack of turn-key manufacturing space and infrastructure to support the relocation of larger industries.
- Moreover, existing incentives may be inadequate to attract desired companies.
- More coordinated industry recruitment efforts would be beneficial
- The region's social/quality of life challenges, such as availability of affordable housing and access to childcare, can be key factors for industries when looking to expand in rural areas like Montezuma and Dolores counties.

The following sectors are listed in order of priority for recruitment based on a voting exercise conducted during the March 24th Regional Team Meeting, and are based on Groundwork notes and market research.

- Light industry (i.e., technology, product assembly, specialty product manufacture, warehousing)
- Home construction (esp. pre-fabricated/modular manufacturing)
- Tourism and recreation
- Recreational product manufacturing
- Agriculture and food processing
- Timber industry
- Value added agriculture is important to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, as well as the future viability of the farm enterprise and grocery store

Retail Gaps

Montezuma and Dolores counties are "undersupplied" in the following retail categories, based on retail leakage data from March 2020 (ESRI Business Analyst).

- Motor vehicle and parts dealers: \$40 million gap
- General merchandise stores: \$16 million gap
- Clothing & accessories stores: \$11 million gap
- Electronics and appliance stores: \$7.5 million gap
- Misc. store retailers (florists, office supply, gifts): \$5 million gap

³⁷ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2021

³⁸ Existing timber industry enterprises include: Aspen Wall Wood (Mancos), Builders FirstSource Truss Plant (Cortez), and Muscanell Millworks Wood Flooring (Dolores). There is new Sawmill in Dolores that produces Veneer plywood and engineered wood.

- Furniture & home furnishings: \$4.5 million gap
- Building material and supplies dealers: \$2 million gap

In terms of gross and retail sales in the region, month-to-month shifts are typically in line with the general seasonality of consumption and with the seasonality of tourism (in Montezuma County).³⁹

Economic Development and Business Support Organizations

A community's business support system can be thought of as the "ecosystem" that supports an economic community. This often includes:

- Formal support (lenders and financial resources, technical assistance providers, training programs)
- Informal support (peer-to-peer networks/mentorship)
- Physical Infrastructure (e.g., broadband, places to obtain resources)
- Social Infrastructure (e.g., information sharing, workforce)

In the Montezuma region, a wealth of economic development and workforce organizations exist at local, county, and regional level. Some entities, like the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provide direct business planning services, while others like the tourism marketing organization and workforce centers ensure businesses have the groundwork to thrive. These organizations include but not limited to the following:

- Region 9 Economic Development
- Southwest Colorado SBDC
- Cortez Workforce Center
- Montezuma County Economic Development
- Dolores County Economic Development Corporation
- Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce
- Municipal economic development departments
- Dove Creek Chamber of Commerce
- Dolores Chamber of Commerce
- Mancos Chamber of Commerce
- Cortez Retail Enhancement Association
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Economic Development Department
- Mesa Verde Country Tourism Office

Along with a handful of community partner organizations, the Cortez Area Chamber of Commerce recently opened the new *Business Resource Center* in early 2022. This downtown Cortez facility provides space for meetings, coworking, and business support.⁴⁰ Staffing will be shared by Cortez Chamber, SBDC, and Region 9. The space is envisioned as a "one stop shop" by combining services from multiple entities into one location. For example, the SBDC and Cortez Workforce Center will offer programming and workshops in the community meeting rooms.

The *Dolores County Economic Development Corporation* (DCEDC) is an independent 501c6, self-funded organization.

³⁹ Montezuma Regional Team Data Packet 2021

⁴⁰ The Business Resource Center includes meeting space, private offices, and coworking desks. There are 15 coworking spaces (8 desks, 4 collaborative tables, 3 semi-private cubicles, and a 12-seat executive meeting room). The facility also includes a larger community room that can seat 100 people, as well as a 36-seat business class room. Source: interview notes.

Revenue is generated through 12-acre industrial park that DCEDC owns and manages. The entity also operates a micro-loan fund that provides assistance to eligible businesses by providing up to \$5K per project.

Business Support Systems: Key Trends & Observations

- More support and services are needed to facilitate resource navigation, peer-to-peer support (mentorship), and interagency collaboration.
- Staffing shortages and capacity limitations are common barriers facing many of these organizations.
- Silos and fragmentation among organizations is persistent (particularly in Montezuma County)⁴¹, but new leadership and collaborative initiatives are helping move things in the right direction.
- It is not always clear to prospective businesses to know where to turn for resources and assistance navigating different permitting, business support, financing entities. According to interviews, this may be truer for Montezuma County than Dolores County.
- Many services, including the SW SBDC, are in Durango. In addition to the physical limitations (1+ hour drive from Cortez), there are some cultural divides between the Cortez area and Durango.
- The region lacks sufficient culturally responsive business support services that: accommodate different perspectives, languages, and beliefs. There is a need for a resource hub that builds trust, is culturally conscious, and prevents people from seeking resources in other areas.
- One observation from a workshop participant: there is an “elephant in the room,” which is a local environment that is very change-resistant and perhaps not the most welcoming to new business.
- There may be opportunities to expand resources to educate the business community about ways they can attract workers, including flexible scheduling and providing living wage.

Broadband Internet Access

- Montezuma and Dolores counties are among the Colorado counties with the lowest percent of households with broadband internet.⁴² Further information and maps can be found in the links provided below:
 - [Poor Broadband Access is Hurting all Rural Colorado Communities](#)
 - [There is a disparate impact on access to broadband for UMUT](#)
 - According to the [Broadband Fund Grant map](#), there have not been many recent awards for broadband projects in southwest CO.
- There are many partners mobilizing to improve broadband access and continued collaboration is needed, particularly to leverage upcoming federal and state funds. The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is a *significant* funding opportunity for rural Colorado broadband investment.
- Regional partners have been convening to strategize about collaborative approaches to broadband investment. For example, the Southwest Colorado Regional Broadband Summit was held in April 2022 at Cortez City Hall.
- The Region 9 Council of Governments (formerly known as Region 9 Economic Development) recently hired a project manager that will focus on coordinating regional broadband initiatives, in addition to regional housing and transportation issues.

⁴¹ For example, the City of Cortez created CREA (Cortez Retail Enhancement Association) essentially as their own mini Chamber of Commerce (city-funded via the sales tax vendor fee).

⁴² 69% Montezuma County, 64% Dolores County households have broadband access compared to 93% statewide. Colorado [Resiliency Dashboard](#).

- [\\$3.5 million EDA grant](#) was recently awarded to the UMUT to support broadband investment.

Education and Workforce Development

- In addition to several school districts and K-12 schools, the Montezuma region's educational institutions include: Pueblo Community College (PCC) Southwest Campus, Southwest Open School, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's Kwiyaqat Community Academy.⁴³
- Innovative programs in education and workforce development include the Homegrown Talent Initiative at Montezuma-Cortez High School
- M-CHS now has a Native American liaison for the school district (for the first time in 150 years). There's also a Native American advisory council.
- The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe has a number of unique institutions and programs, including the Ute Mountain Learning Center.

Educational Outcomes

- CMAS test performance (2020)
 - English Language Arts: 14% and 33% of students meet or exceed expectations in Dolores and Montezuma Counties, compared to 40% in the region and 46% in the state.
 - CMAS Math: 8% and 20% of students meet or exceed expectations in Dolores and Montezuma Counties, respectively, compared to 25% in the region and 35% in the state.
- High school completion (2020)
 - 82% of students in the region completed high school, compared to 83% statewide.
 - Montezuma has the lowest high school completion rate in the region at 79%, which is up from 75% in 2012.
- College matriculation rate (2020): 55% in Dolores and 41% in Montezuma, compared to 52% in the region and 56% in the state.
- There is a higher rate of concurrent enrollment within the region (high school and higher education), with 41% of students participating versus 36% statewide.
- Funding per student is slightly higher regionally compared to Colorado: \$13,159 in Dolores County, \$8,671 in Montezuma; \$8,500 in the state (2020).
- Dolores and Montezuma school districts have some of the highest teacher turnover rates in the state, at 35% and 21%, compared to 16% in the state and 18% in the region overall. The average teacher salary is low Dolores, \$39.7K; Montezuma, \$38.7K; \$44.1K regionally; and \$55K statewide; which has implications for the ability to attract and retain talent.
- The average teacher salary (2020-2021) was \$39,697 in Dolores, \$38,761 in Montezuma, compared to \$44,110 in the region and \$54,950 in the state.
- 10% growth is projected for teaching jobs statewide over the next decade.⁴⁴

⁴³ The Kuyagat School is a charter school (CSI) not overseen by M-C school district.

⁴⁴ *Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*. Colorado Workforce Development Council, 2021

“Edu-conomy,” Tailored Career Pathways, and the Importance of Trades

- From the perspective of many local employers, short-term credentials (such as CTE) and non-degree credentials are increasing in importance compared to Bachelor’s Degrees. Trade jobs are in high demand, and many are high paying.
- “Edu-conomy” is a concept based on the growing recognition of the linkage between education and long-term success in life and work. One local program that embodies “edu-conomy” is the Homegrown Talent Initiative (HGTI). HGTI is a program being piloted in several rural Colorado communities, including Montezuma-Cortez High School. It offers tailored career exploration pathways, particularly those that emphasize skilled trades. More support and coordination with programs like The Homegrown Talent Initiative are needed.
- There was agreement locally that the K-12 education system could do more to lay the foundation for educating students about trades. An initial push to develop interest needs to happen at home and before high school. Therefore, it is important to make connections with students/parents so they can find support for the paths they are passionate about via work-based learning and job shadowing.
- There may be opportunities to further develop and define curriculum and work-based learning experiences so they align with community needs.
- There is widespread desire for a more coordinated approach to making connections between students and the business community for internship and apprenticeships.
- There may be opportunities for more skill-building curriculum for youth and young adults, that in turn provide benefits to the business community (e.g., web design and coding).
- There are great work-based learning initiatives underway but there are disproportionate impacts on who participates in them. For example, white students, with parents that hold secondary degrees, were more likely to enroll in the Business Education Connection compared with their diverse counterparts.

Workforce Development Partners, Higher Education, and Sector Partnerships

- There is somewhat of a disconnect (although improving) between the local school districts and Pueblo Community College Southwest (PCC), in terms of the continuum of education and matching courses with in-demand career pathways. Some of this relates to a staffing/capacity/resources limitation issue.
- Both Pueblo Community College Southwest (PCC) and M-CHS stakeholders, in addition to other workforce development partners, have expressed a desire to develop more education and workforce training pathways that specifically benefit the Native American population. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe has expressed a need for more indigenous educators, health care providers, and other key job positions.
- PCC Southwest recently launched two curriculum-based programs that directly respond to the local community and employment needs in construction and behavioral health.
- Sector partnerships, which are essentially coalitions of education and workforce partners that meet and coordinate around specific industries – are becoming a more common approach across the state.
- There are many existing initiatives, like Southwest Colorado Healthcare Sector Partnership (Care Coordination Collaborative), that could benefit Montezuma region stakeholders if they participated.
- The Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative is a partnership between high schools and two community colleges that provides pathways in career readiness for students to build skills in an economically viable future. Currently, it includes Ignacio, Durango, Bayfield, Pagosa Springs, and Silverton school districts. So far, the focus is on two tracks, environmental science and construction trades, with environmental studies offered at Ft. Lewis and construction trades offered at PCC. None of the Montezuma or Dolores County high schools are yet involved, but there could be an opportunity to join this existing initiative.

Water Supply, Water Access, & Drought

- Key entities involved in the management of the region's water supply include but are not limited to the following: Southwestern Water Conservation District, Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District, La Plata Conservation District, Mancos Rural Water Company, Montezuma Rural Water Company, Mancos Water Conservancy District, and Mancos Conservation District. Dolores Water Conservancy District provides Dolores Project, San Miguel Water Conservancy District, and San Miguel Basin Conservation District.
- The Montezuma region has been severely impacted by cycles of persistent, extreme drought, resulting in critical water shortages. Currently, land within Montezuma and Dolores Counties is classified as ranging from the designations of abnormally dry to extreme drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM). Drought conditions in Montezuma and Dolores Counties have the potential to cause over \$1.3 million in damages annually across the outdoor recreation, agricultural, and tourism sectors.⁴⁵
- Montezuma County declared an emergency due to the drought in April 2022.
- Water delivery on tribal lands was at 10% in 2021, which has had a severe impact on the ability to grow crops.
- The only water basin in the state predicted to be primarily agricultural by 2050 versus domestic water source is in the Montezuma region.
- Much of Dolores and Montezuma Counties exist within areas classified as having a moderate to very high risk of wildfire. It is estimated that these risks pose up to \$9.4 million in potential damages.⁴⁶
- The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe recently prepared a Climate Action Plan. This was a comprehensive effort involving a working group of community members, Colorado State University, University of Colorado, and consulting scientists (hydrologists etc.). The plan identifies priorities related to climate change impacts and mitigation, in tourism, agriculture and food security, air, water resources, wetland systems, rangelands, forest health, and wildlife. The UMUT is also in the process of working on a strategic water plan.

Critical water delivery infrastructure gaps exist, particularly for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.⁴⁷ The infrastructure needed to pipe water from Lake Nighthorse is capital intensive, but necessary for the survival and prosperity of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and is therefore a high priority. UMUT has water rights to 31% of water stored in Lake Nighthorse. However, congress has not yet funded infrastructure to bring it to the reservation.⁴⁸ Like many tribes, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's barriers to accessing water relate directly to a long history of unfair legal rulings that severely curtailed the Tribe's ability to access its water rights:

- The 1908 [Winters v. United States](#) Supreme Court decision established the water rights of U.S. tribal nations to fulfill the "purpose" of the reservation, which generally included agriculture. Though they had among the most senior water rights in the region, dating back to the 1868 "[Kit Carson Treaty](#)" creating the reservation, the UMUT did not gain fair access to these rights. 86 years passed from when the Winters ruling was issued and when water flowed onto the Ute Mountain Ute reservation.
- In 1922 Colorado River Compact divided the Colorado River into upper and lower basins and divided water rights. Tribes were left out of this discussion (were not granted citizenship until 1924).

⁴⁵ These damages increase by almost 2x when factoring in projections for increased temperatures and decreased precipitation due to climate change.

⁴⁶ Montezuma Regional Team Data Packet 2021

⁴⁷ <https://coloradosun.com/2022/04/03/drought-southwest-colorado-farmers-water-supply/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.durangoherald.com/articles/durangos-councilors-back-tribes-water-request/>

- In 1988, the UMUT accepted reservoir water rights in exchange for ceding rights to their share of the Mancos River.
- Currently, water shortage plans that guide the Colorado River Compact are under review by the Bureau of Reclamation. There has been an increased effort to invite Tribes to the table for the Southwestern Water Conservation District convenings.⁴⁹

Food & Agricultural Resources

- Agriculture has maintained cultural and economic importance in both Montezuma and Dolores counties. In Dolores County, agriculture makes up an estimated 30% of the economy.⁵⁰ Agriculture is also an important part of Montezuma County, where there are over 1,000 working farms, most being smaller in scale, typically under four acres.⁵¹ Agriculture also has implications for tourism, as people have come to know and appreciate the region's agricultural landscapes and working farm and range land.
- There has been a growth in niche crops, including wheat, corn, beans, and hay. The Ute Mountain Ute Farm Enterprise and the Tribe's Bow & Arrow Brand of food products have been successful at producing, processing, and branding many of these niche crops.
- The region has seen growth in community-based, small-scale food initiatives. For example, there is a local movement to revive traditional crops such as heritage breeds of apples (Montezuma Restoration Project).
- There is a strong network of organizations involved in food security in the region, including the Share House, Good Samaritan, Pinon Project, and many others. Southwest Farm Fresh is a local farmer cooperative working to expand market opportunities for local farm products.
- Currently, Montezuma County has two existing certified kitchens, and Cortez's Sharehouse is developing their own community-friendly certified kitchen.
- PCC recently launched a new agriculture curriculum and certificate program.

Food & Agriculture: Issues and Considerations

- Agriculture in the context of resilience:
 - Farmers are prone to face hardships during economic downturns and other external stressors. The costs of inputs (fuel, other farm inputs) can be prohibitive. An increase in natural disasters such as periods of prolonged drought, on top of economic crises, mean that farmers face even greater hardships. Creative farming solutions and financial and technical assistance for farmers must be more widely embraced.
 - CSU Extension (in Montezuma and Dolores counties) has an agricultural management team that provides an array of hands-on tools to support farmers. The success of farming and food systems comes down to business support, and embracing farming methods that save costs and water.
 - A more coordinated effort to connect farmers/producers to state and local funding opportunities could be beneficial, as farmers have limited capacity to find/apply for funding. There is new grant writing capacity in the counties and Region 9.
 - Farming and drought-tolerant crops: the viability of commercial-scale agriculture in the context of prolonged drought ties into conversations around the need for more drought tolerant crops and

⁴⁹ <https://coloradosun.com/2021/07/28/ute-mountain-ute-drought-dolores-river-four-corners/>

⁵⁰ CSU Extension Dolores County

⁵¹ Based on conversations with the Sharehouse

sustainable farming practices. For example, nitrogen-rich food waste generated in the region could be repurposed to compost to improve soil's ability to retain water (ex. food waste from casinos and large institutions).

- Value-added food processing
 - There is a new USDA certified meat processing facility near Cortez, which brings more opportunities to expand meat processing (e.g., poultry).
 - According to conversations with farm organizations, greens do particularly well in the region and most farmers would rather sell in bulk—and they might ramp up production of greens if there was more of a guarantee of buyers and a facility to repackage bulk to retail.
 - A cannery could be beneficial to preserve/package products like beans.
 - There may be additional barriers to remove in order to expand local food processing. Local land use codes often overlook the craft-based industry's needs for flexible zoning
- Food systems and markets
 - There are high transportation costs to get products to market, no ranching/dairy local end markets to keep hay in the community. Efforts should support transportation projects mobilized to facilitate the movement of agricultural products through strategic partnerships even beyond the region to export products cost-effectively.
 - The Food Connectivity Project is an existing group working on food systems coordination that extends up to Gunnison and down to the Four Corners region.
 - Facilitation may be needed to ensure existing businesses to use more local products and services, keeping more money spent in the region.

Housing

- The region is experiencing a crisis of housing affordability and availability. The region's housing supply has been squeezed by buyers seeking second homes during the pandemic, as well as an increase in unoccupied seasonal homes. In Dolores County, there has been a 21% increase in unoccupied seasonal units.
- Montezuma County experienced the second most drastic median home price increase in the state from 2019-2021.⁵²
- In Dolores County, one-third of the housing stock is vacated for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.⁵³ The price of homes has gone up significantly. Plus, there are few units available for rent under \$500/month.
- While cost of living is considered low compared to other parts of the state and nation, half of all renters in Southwest Colorado⁵⁴ are considered "housing cost burdened."⁵⁵ Incomes have significantly lagged behind housing price increases, while the average cost of rent has risen.
- The current supply of public affordable housing cannot keep up with demand. This has been felt by the Montezuma County Housing Authority, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and many other local housing providers. There are roughly 45 new people on the Montezuma County Housing Authority waitlist each month.
- There is an acute demand for housing among the UMUT and Navajo Nation. The UMUT lacks about 200 homes for tribal members, and housing plans are needed to build and repair homes for Towaoc and White

⁵² [Denver Post article, January 2022](#)

⁵³ Regional Data Packet: Montezuma County Regional Team

⁵⁴ Includes Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan counties

⁵⁵ Households that spend 30%+ income on housing and utilities are commonly referred to as cost-burdened

Mesa. Sites have been approved for development on the south end of Towaoc, but there is ground level infrastructure needed (water & sewage).

- More housing is needed to accommodate lower- and middle-income workers and earners, seniors, non-traditional households, and people experiencing homelessness.⁵⁶ According to the SWCCOG Housing Needs Assessment, an estimated 220 new housing units are needed (rental and ownership) over the next three years. The focus should be on more attainable workforce housing, for middle and lower income; more housing needed to accommodate seniors, and non-traditional households.
- The lack of housing options is also a significant barrier to recruit businesses to move to the region and attract employees from a variety of skill levels.
- One of the paramount challenges for rural areas like the Montezuma region is attracting housing developers to build a relatively small number of units (economies of scale), all while navigating somewhat complicated regulatory codes and approval processes. Moreover, there are high costs of building materials, increasing land costs, and barriers to the provision of ground level infrastructure (water and sewer) and utilities, that have impacted the supply of new housing.
- Future housing opportunities should focus on affordable, energy efficient, water conserving, healthy, culturally appropriate options.
- Key housing partners in the region include: SW Housing Solutions (builds supportive and affordable housing; manage loan fund for homeowners and repairs needed), Southwest Colorado Council of Government (provides regional leadership on behalf of local governments), Homes Fund (focuses on home ownership), Habitat for Humanity - Archuleta & La Plata, Mercy Housing (national affordable housing developer), Pinon Project, Montezuma Housing Authority, and many others.
- Funding and organizational capacity were identified as key challenges.

Mental & Behavioral Health

- The Montezuma and Dolores County region has several assets and organizations working in mental and behavioral health, including:
 - Axis Health Systems, a community health center with several facilities in the region that offers a range of services for people seeking healthcare.
 - Cortez Recovery Center, an outpatient treatment center for alcohol and substance abuse and for non-substance related mental healthcare, in Cortez.
 - Moguan Mental Health Center, a new mental health care center that opened in 2019 and provides mental health services for youth and adult tribal members.
 - Communities that Care Montezuma County is a program focused on reducing youth substance use
 - Pinon Project offers a variety of programs and services, including mental health, access to resources, family resources, housing programs, and more.
 - Team Up (United Way), is a collective impact initiative in Montezuma and Dolores counties that organizes 8 different action teams that cover topics such as youth mental health, food security, early childhood education, and behavioral health.
- *The Community Intervention Program (CIP)* is a Montezuma County initiative that launched in 2022 to better respond to non-criminal crises (such as mental health, homelessness support, intoxication or substance use concerns, welfare checks). It uses a co-responder model with an EMT and behavioral health specialist trained in harm reduction. Current service areas include Cortez, Dolores, Mancos, unincorporated County.

⁵⁶ *Regional Housing Needs Assessment*, Prepared by Root Policy Center, 2021

- Opioid settlement funding: The region is expected to receive funding over the next 18 years to invest in mental health and substance abuse treatment. The SouthWEST Opioid Response District (SWORD) is comprised of representatives from Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan Counties. Region 9 Economic Development is leading a feasibility study to determine the best use of funds. The UMUT and Southern Ute Tribes are also receiving separate opioid settlement allocations.
- According to the Colorado Vital Statistics Program, Montezuma County has the 8th highest suicide rate per 100,000 people (between 2014-2019).
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a reported rise in Montezuma County⁵⁷ for the following:
 - Domestic violence (+15% in calls)
 - Suicide and self-harm (+21% in calls)
 - Substance abuse (emergency room admissions, 25% increase)
 - Overdose (+74% in calls)
- According to CDC data on youth mental health during the covid pandemic, 44% of HS students in the US reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year (in 2021).⁵⁸ 3 in 4 parents say the pandemic has taken a toll on their child's mental health (survey of 1,000 parents // Children's Hospital of Chicago).
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribal members are more likely to have higher rates Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are correlated with increased risks of adult health issues.
- Based on conversations with mental and behavioral health clinicians and social workers, there is a shortage of culturally responsive care available in the region.
- Disparities exist within the region in terms of vulnerability and access to resources.
- A 12% increase in employment demand for mental & behavioral healthcare is expected by 2030, statewide.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Montezuma County Police data (from CIP grant application)

⁵⁸ CDC Data on Youth Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2022)

⁵⁹ *Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*. Colorado Workforce Development Council, 2021

E. Links to Meeting Notes & Recordings, Strategies Matrix, and Action Plans

Meeting Notes, Slides, and Recordings

The linked [Google Drive folder](#) contains the following for each workshop:

- Zoom recording
- Meeting notes
- Topic based workshop presentation slides

Final presentation (October 17th)

- [Presentation slides](#)

Strategies Matrix

[STRATEGIES MATRIX](#) – see linked spreadsheet detailing recommended actions, implementation partners, and funding resources for all strategies considered in the Roadmaps planning process.

Action Plans

1. Coordinate strategic investments in water delivery and storage infrastructure: [Objective 1 Action Plan](#)
2. Increase water efficient, drought-tolerant, and regenerative farming practices: [Objective 2 Action Plan](#)
3. Expand the market potential of locally-grown and processed food products, while increasing food security and food access for local residents: [Objective 3 Action Plan](#)
4. Expand Broadband internet access: [Objective 4 Action Plan](#)
5. Support career pathways, hands-on learning opportunities, and workforce programs that align with economic development goals: [Objective 5 Action Plan](#)
6. Improve business support for existing and prospective businesses & entrepreneurs: [Objective 6 Action Plan](#)
7. Increase intra-governmental collaboration to access housing incentives and explore innovative financing mechanisms: [Objective 7 Action Plan](#)
8. Create an adequate supply of workforce (and prefabricated) housing: [Objective 8 Action Plan](#)
9. Improve collaboration among the region's mental and behavioral health providers to better address workforce and service gaps: [Objective 9 Action Plan](#)
10. Improve youth mental & behavioral health outcomes, and community engagement: [Objective 10 Action Plan](#)



COLORADO COVID-19 REGIONAL RESILIENCY & RECOVERY ROADMAPS

MONTEZUMA REGIONAL

COMMUNITY ROADMAP PLAN

P.U.M.A.