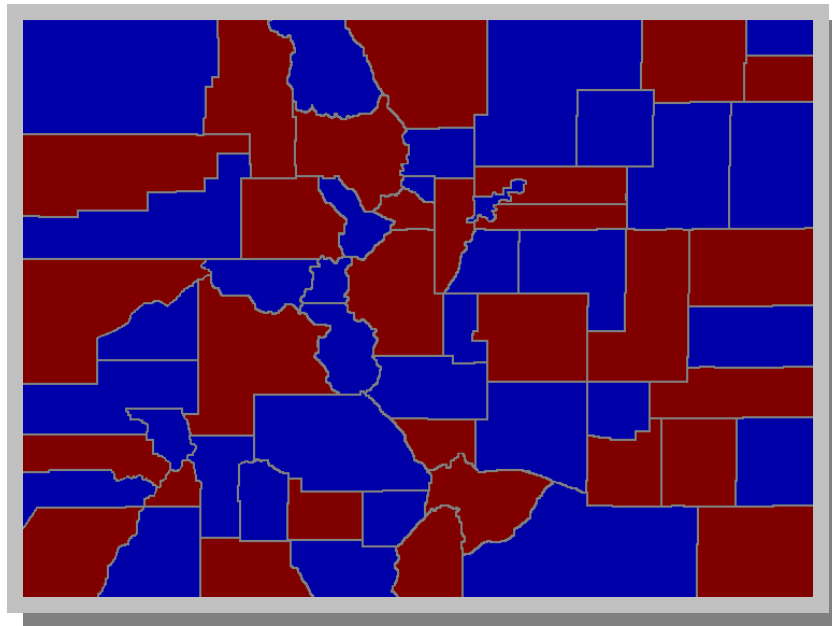




Governor's Commission on Community Service

Office of Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien



Colorado Needs Assessment Report on Community Service, Volunteerism, and Civic Engagement:

F i n d i n g s a n d I m p l i c a t i o n s f o r A c t i o n

"Building a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in Colorado."



Acknowledgements

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- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
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Barb Lessman (Executive Assistant)
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Mesa State College

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The mission of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteerism. More information about the CNCS may be found at <http://www.nationalservice.org/>.

The El Pomar Foundation, whose mission is to enhance, encourage, and promote the current and future well being of the people of Colorado through grantmaking and community stewardship is one of the largest and oldest private foundations in the Rocky Mountain West. More foundation information may be found at <http://www.elpomar.org/>.



Authors:

Janet Mickish, Ph.D., Community Planning and Volunteer Service Initiatives Coordinator
Governor's Commission on Community Service

Toya Nelson, Executive Director
Governor's Commission on Community Service

Layout and Design:

Jovan Melton, Program Coordinator
Governor's Commission on Community Service

Staff Support and Assistance:

Mark Skinner, Senior Program Officer
Governor's Commission on Community Service

Terri Jutzi, Program Officer
Governor's Commission on Community Service

April 2009

Denver, Colorado

This report is produced by:

The Governor's Commission on Community Service
Office of Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien
225 East 16th Avenue, Suite B-52
Denver, Colorado 80203
303.866-6426 • governors.commission@state.co.us

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STATE OF COLORADO

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

136 State Capitol
Denver, Colorado 80203-1792
Phone: (303) 866-2471



April 2009

Colorado is unmatched as a place to live and raise a family. At the same time, we know that many Colorado communities face many challenges. This is especially so in rural, remote, and isolated communities; and especially so in under-served urban neighborhoods.

This report highlights the most pressing human, social, economic, and environmental challenges facing many communities at the grassroots level. This report recommends opportunities for a new “service solution strategy,” and provides a framework for strengthening communities through volunteerism and community service. In partnership with private non-profit organizations and community foundations, this report also offers suggestions for steps that can be taken by local and state government to mobilize community service resources and address these needs.

While we have made major in-roads into health care and education reform, and made transportation investments, provided environmental protections, and promoted economic development through Colorado’s new energy economy, we also recognize that the impact and influence of federal and state government leadership is insufficient. The collective action of state and local government, non-profit community service organizations, and private philanthropy offers the best opportunity for addressing some of our most critical social, human services, educational, and environmental issues.

This report provides a fresh perspective on community needs so that we are better able to direct resources to those areas. I urge you to consider the information in this report, and encourage your support for strong and community-based public-private partnerships as a way to strengthen Colorado’s communities and improve the lives of children and families for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor
State of Colorado



STATE OF COLORADO

OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

130 State Capitol
Denver, Colorado 80203-1792
Phone: (303) 866-2087



April 2009

The mission of the Governor's Commission on Community Service is to administer the Colorado AmeriCorps*State program, and to serve as a catalyst for the promotion and expansion of community service and volunteerism to all Coloradans as an effective means to address civic and social issues, and to improve the overall well being of communities throughout the state.

The hallmark of the work of the Governor's Commission on Community Service is the principle of public-private partnership with the local non-profit community, educational, governmental and community-based organizations, providing direct services to meet priority community needs. For the first time in over 10 years the Governor's Commission has worked with local communities to conduct an in-depth study of priority needs in these communities. In select communities and regions across the state, we have asked:

- What are your most pressing needs?
- How best can we direct state resources in response to these needs?
- How can we assist you in mobilizing and marshalling local resources – both public and private- to strengthen your community?

This report offers an opportunity for governmental and non-governmental sectors to open dialogue and work together to respond to pressing human, social and economic needs as identified by the communities themselves. These findings and action steps offer policies and program initiatives to direct community and governmental resources in strengthening community services supporting children and families in Colorado.

In the ensuing months the GCCS Commissioners and staff will return to local communities armed with new data and a fresh perspective, and a framework for engaging public and private sector collaboration. We hope this report will help guide local dialogue, deliberation and policies to meet these challenges.

Sincerely,

Barbara O'Brien
Lieutenant Governor
State of Colorado



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About the Commission

The Governor's Commission on Community Service, under the Office of Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien, promotes the ethic of service and volunteerism throughout Colorado, and carries out initiatives in the areas of mentoring and literacy.

The Governor's Commission supports and promotes volunteer service to all citizens as an effective means to address community needs and foster a collective commitment to lifelong community service.

As administrators of the AmeriCorps*State Programs in Colorado, the Commission builds on the dedication and expertise of individual citizens and public and private systems to expand civic participation and engagement in solving challenges faced by Colorado communities.

Mission

The Governor's Commission serves as a catalyst for the promotion and expansion of community service and volunteerism to all Colorado residents as an effective means to address civic and social issues and improve the overall well being of communities throughout the state.

2009 AmeriCorps State Programs

- Adams County School District 14
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Commerce City, CO
720.322.8113
- Colorado Youth Corps Assoc.
Statewide
303.863.0600
- Partners in Routt County
Healthy Lifestyles Mentoring
Steamboat Springs, CO
970.879.2135
- Year One, Inc.
Mile High Youth Corps
Statewide
303.433.1206
- Board of Weld County
Commissioners
Weld County Youth
Conservation Corps
Greeley, CO
970.353.8300, Ext. 3400
- Colorado Parent and Child Foundation
Colorado HIPPIY AmeriCorps
Statewide
303.860.6000
- City and County of Denver
Community Building Partnerships
for Youth in Transition
Denver, CO
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Fort Collins

Darius Smith
Denver

Commission Staff

Toya M. Nelson, Executive Director

Mark Skinner, Senior Program Officer

Terri Jutzi, Program Officer

Janet Mickish PhD, Community &
Volunteer Initiatives Coordinator

Jovan Melton, Program Coordinator

Governor's Commission on Community Service

225 East 16th Avenue, Suite B-52
Denver, CO 80203

303.866.6426 • www.colorado.gov/gccs



Introduction

Health is more than the absence of disease. A healthy community is more than the absence of political and economic strife. A healthy community is one in which all people are actively working together to ensure their individual and collective success and well being.

The mission of the Governor's Commission on Community Service (GCCS) is to serve as a catalyst for building healthy communities by promoting and expanding "community service and volunteerism to all Colorado residents as an effective means to address civic and social issues and improve the overall well being of communities throughout the state."¹

To ensure that Commission continues to address community needs, every three years the GCCS produces a state service plan to guide development, determine service goals and priorities, and to recommend the distribution of resources. The 2008 – 2009 statewide needs assessment will serve as the foundation for the development of the *2009-2011 State Service Plan*.

In collaboration with the Lieutenant Governor's Office, and in light of the *Colorado Promise* and the GCCS' mission and the programs it manages, the GCCS designed the needs assessment to address seven categories: civic engagement, conservation and the environment, people with a disability, early childhood, education, health and health care, youth development.

Six needs assessment sites were selected based on a number of factors including GCCS resources, site location, diversity of perspective, economy, resiliency, perceived need, and ability to engage in ongoing collaboration with the GCCS to build community capacity. The participant sites were Mesa, Prowers, Pueblo, and Weld counties, as well as the San Luis Valley and Southwest Colorado.

This report summarizes the findings of a year-long community needs assessment concerning civic engagement and suggests action steps for GCCS based on those findings. It is intended to inform the GCCS, citizens, government entities, non-profit organizations, businesses, and communities about civic engagement as a key strategy to help not only make it through these difficult economic times, but also to facilitate the establishment of a foundation from which to build a brighter future. Thus, the target audiences for the reports are those who are interested in strengthening communities: general public, businesses, non-profit agencies, and governments.



The "community needs" presented by this report are those that have emerged through several "filters." First, the community must have identified it as a need for which they desire some assistance. Second, the community-identified issue must be among the categories recognized by the Colorado Promise, Lieutenant Governor, GCCS, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Third, the issue must be something that is within the scope and power of GCCS to address.



A. Framework and Process

The framework for the needs assessment and the Colorado's 2009-2011 State Service Plan is derived from the *Colorado Promise*,² 2006-2010 Strategic Plan for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS),³ the Lieutenant Governor's Strategic Initiatives, and the mission of the GCCS.⁴

Phase 1

During Phase 1, (March – August, 2008) general information about community needs was obtained by mining databases and information from needs assessments conducted by national, state, and local entities along with GCCS administered surveys. Deeper information in select communities was obtained by attending community forums, convening community meetings, and conducting interviews in 6 primary sites (Mesa County, Prowers County, Pueblo County, San Luis Valley, Southwest Colorado, Weld County,) and 2 secondary sites (Boulder and Denver). Additionally, information from attending the Community Resource Center's *Rural Philanthropy Days* for northwest Colorado (held in Burlington), south central Colorado (held in Cripple Creek), and meetings with the Southern Ute Tribal Council and the chair of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe were incorporated into this report.

People from a variety of backgrounds and sectors, such as community leaders, appointed and elected officials, educators, business people, health care and human service providers, law enforcement, clergy, youth, non-profit organizations, private foundations, retirees, AmeriCorps service corps program representatives (e.g., VISTA, RSVP, NCCC), Rotary Club, and other individuals and agency representatives provided input into the needs assessment. While a few of the needs assessment participants represented a local interest (e.g., a local childcare center), most represented entities that serve the entire county or region where they reside.

Twenty-eight community forums were held in Alamosa, Durango, Cortez, Grand Junction, Greeley, Lamar, Monte Vista, Pagosa Springs, and Pueblo. Information was also obtained from seven small group discussions, 17 interviews, and an audience with the Southern Ute Tribal Council as well as the Ernest House, Sr., Chairperson of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

Additional interviews and small group discussions were conducted to obtain more information about a geographical area or topic (e.g., economy, early childhood, conservation). Approximately 400 people participated in this phase of the needs assessment. Community forums averaged about 12 people each. The big exception was Pagosa Springs that hosted a lively and informative forum of at least 100 people.





Table 1

Needs Assessment Forums, Small Groups, and Interviews

	Mesa County	Prowers County	Pueblo County	San Luis Valley	Southwest Colorado	Weld County	
<i>Forums</i>	4	2	5	6	4	7	28
<i>Small Groups</i>	3	0	1	1	1	0	6
<i>Audience with Southern Ute Tribal Council & Chair of Ute Mountain Ute Tribe</i>					2		2
<i>Interviews During Community Visits</i>	7	2	2	1	4	1	17
TOTAL							53

Events Attended

- Lamar / Prowers County Focus group hosted by the Community Revitalization Program of the Colorado Community Revitalization Association
- Rural Philanthropy Days, Heart of Colorado: Chaffee, Custer, Fremont, Park, Teller counties
- Rural Philanthropy Days, Northeast Rural: Cheyenne, Phillips, Sedgwick, Morgan, Logan, Yuma, Washington, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Elbert counties
- Creating Pueblo's Future Conference

Phase 2

During Phase 2, (September 2008 – January 2009) those who participated in Phase 1 were invited back for a two-hour follow-up community forum. Follow-up forums were held in Alamosa, Durango, Greeley, Grand Junction, Lamar, and Pueblo. Approximately 75 people participated in those forums. Additional interviews were conducted to obtain more information about a geographical area or topic (e.g., economy, early childhood).

In all, approximately 500 people participated in 34 community forums, 8 small group discussions, numerous person-to-person and telephone interviews, and email discussions.



B. Limitations

Analyzing and integrating the vast quantities of information and differing opinions is a daunting task. Every attempt was made to honor the complexities of each entity, while providing general contextual information that will help individual organizations, communities, and counties as well as the Governor's Commission on Community Service.

As with all research, the needs assessment has limitations along a number of dimensions (e.g., staff, time frame, budget, geographic scope, secondary data, sample size and representation). These factors are particularly pronounced in rural and frontier areas.

Although this report reflects a snapshot of community needs as identified and expressed in 2009, these findings are valid and reliable. These findings and implications for action will be used to inform the work of the GCCS, and, to the greatest extent possible, to direct community service resources in response to these priority needs.

C. Next Steps

GCCS is committed to the following steps in response to the community findings and results of the needs assessment report:

1. Develop the 2009-2011 three-year *State Service Plan*. The state service plan, identifying priority needs, key partners and stakeholders, service strategies and outcomes is required of all State Commissions. The 2009 needs assessment report will be used as the basis for developing the next three-year state service plan.
2. Direct state resources in response to identified local needs. Several specific, concrete suggestions for state assistance have been identified. The GCCS will follow up in those areas involving strengthening communities through, civic engagement, volunteer and community service programs, including:
 - Develop volunteer infrastructure: assist in developing volunteer community service infrastructure, volunteer centers, and local resource coordination to increase community volunteerism, and to maximize and leverage private and public community resources.
 - Leadership development and training for non-profit managers – assist in developing technical assistance and training for community service and volunteer organizations.
 - Direct AmeriCorps program resources in areas of greatest needs, including: early childhood development, education, youth development, health, environment, and civic engagement programs.
 - Sharing best practices – conduct a statewide public information and education campaign to increase public awareness and communication, and showcase successful civic engagement and volunteer services and programs.
 - Assist in supporting statewide volunteer matching programs, including internet technology support for locating and matching service needs and potential volunteers.
 - Assist in developing programs for youth, including programs that engage youth and students as volunteers, youth mentoring, and Learn and Serve programs.



3. Continued outreach and follow-up. GCCS will continue dialogue with policy makers, thought leaders and partners, with a commitment to on-going community follow-up, re-assessment and program modification.

4. Improved coordination and communication between and among:

- AmeriCorps State Programs
- Service Corps partners, including AmeriCorps National, National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), Learn and Serve, Senior Corps, RSVP and Volunteers in service to America (VISTA).
- Other Colorado state agency partners, such as the Department of Local Affairs, Department of Labor and Employment, and Department of Education
- Non-governmental (private sector) service agencies and partners
- Community foundations, philanthropic organizations
- Local units of government





County Areas and Profiles

The GCCS, in collaboration with the Lieutenant Governor's Office, and in light of the *Colorado Promise* and the GCCS' mission and the programs it manages, selected seven needs assessment categories:

- civic engagement
- conservation and the environment
- serving people with a disability
- early childhood
- education
- health and health care
- youth development

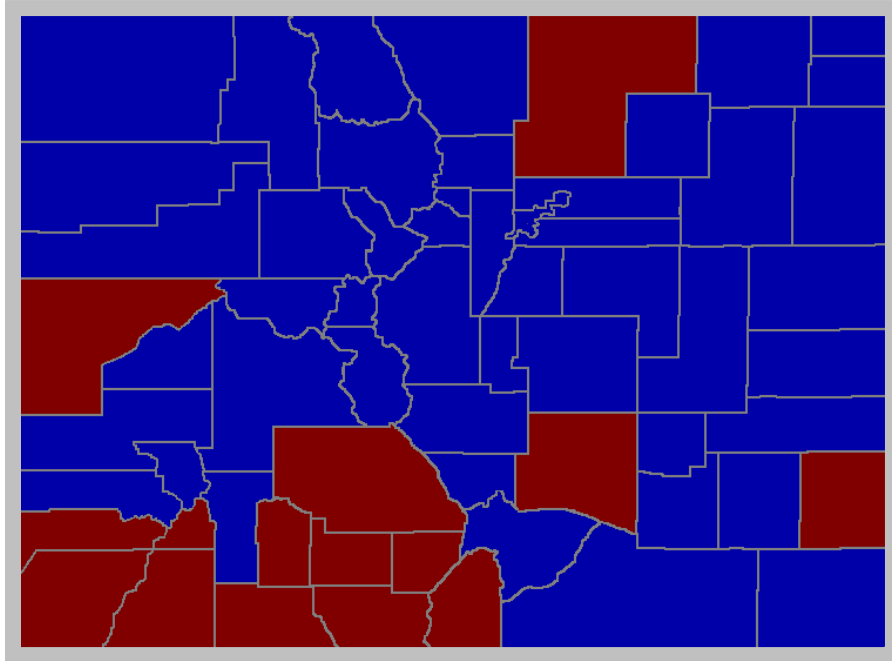
Taken together, the sites were to cover a significant portion of the state (e.g., north, south, east, west). Selection of individual needs assessment sites was based one or more criteria:

- outside Denver or Colorado Springs metropolitan areas
- historically underserved
- significant needs that GCCS can address
- resilient
- ability to develop ongoing collaboration with GCCS to strengthen communities
- diverse population
- pockets of high economic need



The GCCS resources available to conduct a needs assessment that would do justice to all the sites selected limited the number of sites. The GCCS designed the needs assessment to provide sufficient depth and breadth of research and relationship building to provide more than accurate "data."

The entire project was designed to build relationships and generate products and processes upon which the community taking part in the assessment, the GCCS, and other government and non-government entities could continue to strengthen Colorado and its communities.



The six selected areas cover a large portion of the state and vary greatly by geography, history, demography, economy, needs, and civic engagement. The largest part of the state not represented in the needs assessment was northwest Colorado.

- Mesa County (west central)
- Prowers County (south east)
- Pueblo County (central)
- Weld County (north)
- The San Luis Valley (south central)
- Southwest Colorado (south west)

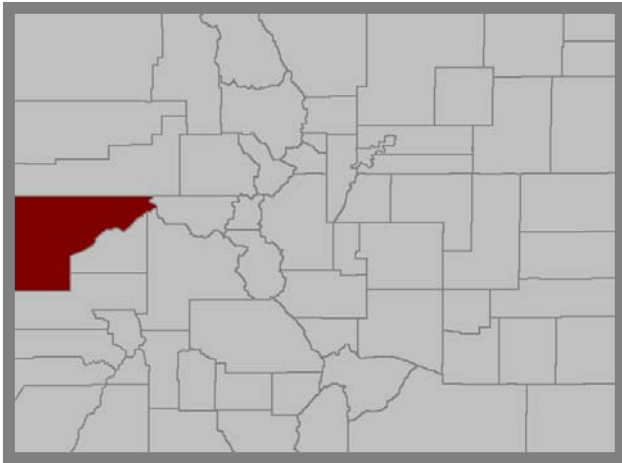
By definition, this report is about community “needs” and therefore focuses on areas communities have identified as in need of improvement. All participating communities have encountered difficult times and have demonstrated amazing resilience. Almost all are very healthy by any standard, and are becoming stronger through their own vision, resourcefulness, and hard work. Most are also receiving much-deserved financial and business awards (e.g., alternative energy production).

As a result of the combination of internal and external collaborations, their futures are bright. They have a sound economy and engaged citizenry. They are filled with people who are strong, generous, innovative, cooperative, courageous, tenacious, giving, intelligent, and a hundred more positive descriptors. Therefore, while the seven needs assessment reports (six area reports and this summary report) focus on community “needs,” the reader should not lose sight of the fact that all communities possess many positive aspects not covered in the reports.

Below is very brief profile of each participating county and region. Because almost all communities identified the same needs, those needs were summarized and are offered in the next section: “Key Findings.” Four core aspects of participating communities are presented below: location, population, economy, and community engagement. For more information about participating communities and the community context of their unique needs, please refer to the in-depth individual site reports found at: www.colorado.gov/gccs/needsassessmentreports.html.



A. Mesa County



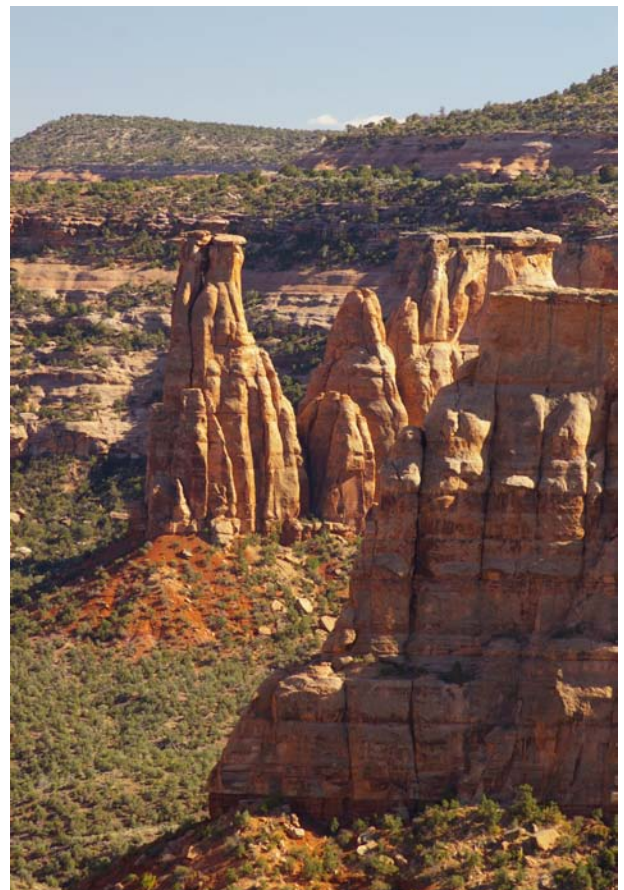
Named for the many high, flat landmasses or mesas in the area, Mesa County sits on the western border of Colorado about midpoint between Wyoming and New Mexico as well as Salt Lake City and Denver. With a 2007 population of 139,082,⁵ Mesa County (especially Grand Junction, its county seat) is the largest population, service, and economic center in western Colorado.⁶

Between 1990 and 2000 its population grew by 24.8%, placing it in the top 10% of counties nationwide in terms of population change.⁷ Fueled by the influx of retirees into the area as well as recreational opportunities and jobs related to the extraction of gas and other precious materials, some projected that Mesa County's population would grow to 224,820 by 2025 (92.3% growth from 2000).

Because the county's economy has become stronger over the past decade because of planned diversification and strategic growth, the County is poised to weather the recent pull out of many of the gas extraction operations and the wider economic recession.

Thousands of people volunteer for the 774 registered non-profit entities with assets in excess of nearly \$550 million in Mesa County.⁸ During 2005, the northwest region of Colorado accounted for \$285 million in charitable giving – 15% of all itemized contributions in the state. The northwest region (giving 3.8% of income) ranked slightly above the state (3.4%) and national (3.6%) average for generosity, while Mesa County's contributions (3.4%) were below the region's and nation's but matched the State's.⁹

Mesa County residents vote in significantly higher numbers than the nation as a whole and somewhat higher than Colorado. In both 2004 and 2008 there was a 92% voter turnout compared to Colorado's 89% and 70% turnout for the same years.¹⁰



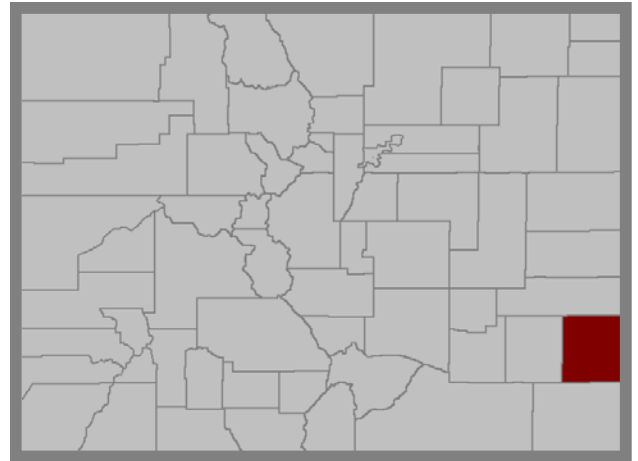


B. Prowers County

Prowers County is a high plains, rural, semi-arid, agricultural county located in the southeast portion of both Colorado and the fertile Arkansas River Valley. Colorado counties (Kiowa, Bent, Baca) border three sides of the County and Kansas abuts its eastern border. The 2007 County population was 13,181¹¹ with Lamar, the county seat, and the largest of the county's six incorporated communities, serving as the industrial, retail, and transportation center for southeast Colorado.

Between 1990 and 2000 its population grew by 8%.¹² Between 2000 and 2007, the County's population decreased by 1,200 people or nearly 9%.¹³ Most jobs in the County are in the service industries and pay low wages. With plans for increased economic opportunities combined with the increase in retirees moving to the area, some project that the County will continue steady growth.¹⁴

Enhancing the economy are Colorado Green, Prairie Wind Energy, and the proposed Pierre Auger Observatory. In 2003, the largest wind farm in the U.S, and the fifth largest in the world, was constructed in southwestern Prowers County.¹⁵



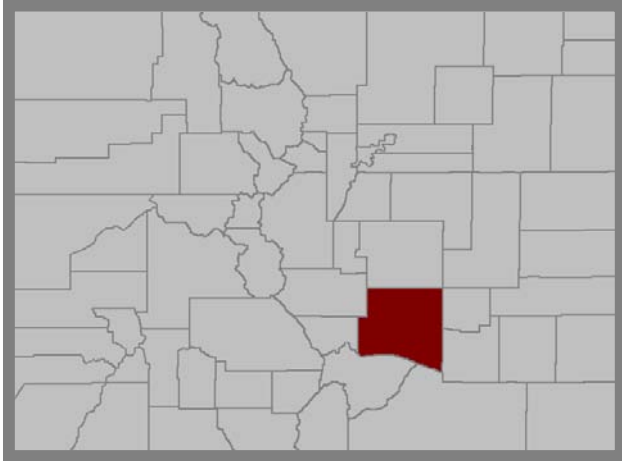
The County is also the site of an Xcel Energy Converter Station that converts and transmits electricity between U.S. coasts. In the near future, a world class, largest of its kind in the world, cosmic ray observatory (Pierre Auger Observatory) will be built, along with visitor's and scientific conference centers on the Lamar Community College grounds.

Prowers County residents provide hundreds of volunteer hours to support the County's 150 registered non-profit entities with assets of nearly \$55 million.¹⁶ The percentage of their personal income Prowers County (5.2%) and Lamar (5.4%) residents contributed to charity in 2005 far exceeds those for Colorado (3.4%) and the nation (3.6%).¹⁷

Prowers County residents vote in significantly higher numbers than the nation as a whole and somewhat higher than Colorado. In 2004, a whopping 95% turned out to vote in the general election while in 2006, 56% voted and in 2008 72% voted. This is compared to Colorado's 89%, 63%, and 70% and the nation's 55%, 37%, and 62% turnout for the same years.¹⁸



C. Pueblo County

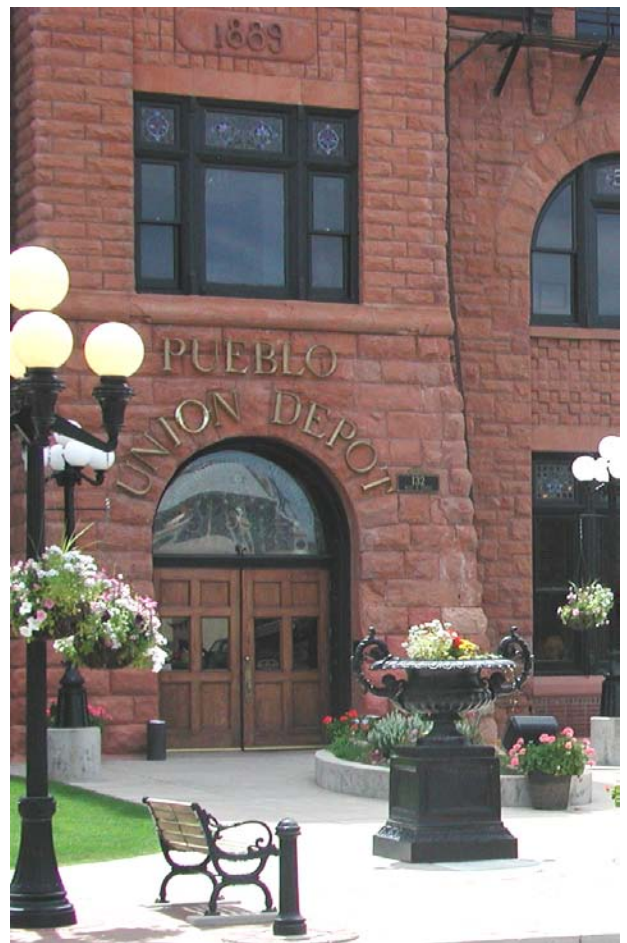


Pueblo County is located in the southeastern part of Colorado along the Front Range Interstate-25 corridor, 120 miles south of Denver. Pueblo County is 2,389 square miles¹⁹ extending into the mountains from the south and west, foothills to the north and arid plains to the east. Elevations in Pueblo County range from 4,400 to 12,000 feet.²⁰ Pueblo County's 2007 population was estimated at 154,538, a 14.6% increase from 1997.²¹ Of that number, 67.8% reside in the City of Pueblo,²² the county seat and the largest city the southern Colorado area.

Historically, the major industries in Pueblo County have been steel production and other manufacturing, government, healthcare, education, agriculture, retail businesses, and accommodations and foodservices. With the closing of the steel mill and a number of other large businesses, today most workers are employed in low wage service jobs. Community leaders' work to enhance the County's economy has paid off. Colorado State University-Pueblo is opening a new solar power system, one of the nation's largest at an educational institution. Pueblo also received awards for \$1 million for the Pueblo Sustainable New Energy Communities Initiative and will be the site of a multi-million dollar wind turbine plant.

There are 855 registered non-profit entities with assets in excess of \$1 billion in Pueblo County.²³ Thousands of volunteers make it possible for those organizations to provide life saving services and improve the quality of life for all County residents. Monetary giving in Pueblo County (3% of personal income) is slightly below the average for the state (3.4%) and the nation (3.6%).

Although the County voter turnout (75%) was lower in 2004 than for Colorado (89%), it far exceeded that for the U.S. (55.3%).²⁴ Furthermore, the County turnout for the 2006 (84%) and 2008 (91%) general elections were well above those for the state (63%, 70%) and the nation (37%, 62%).





D. San Luis Valley



The San Luis Valley (SLV) is located in south central Colorado and is generally considered to extend across six rural and frontier counties: Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, Saguache. It is the world's largest alpine valley at 7,600 feet high and 8,200 square miles (about the size of Delaware). The Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, the San Juan Mountains to the west, the Continental Divide to the northwest, and New Mexico to the south frame the valley. The majority of the population is concentrated in a few of the 22 incorporated cities and towns scattered throughout the six counties. Many consider Alamosa (Alamosa County's county seat) the hub of the SLV because of its services, amenities, size, centrality, and highway crossroads.

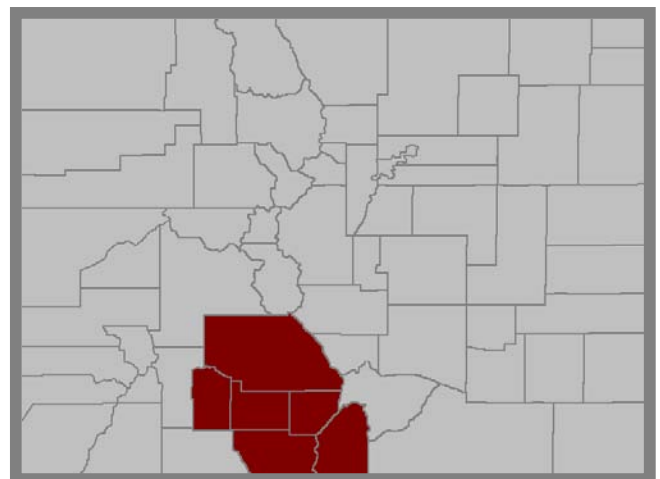
SLV's 2007 population was 48,204.²⁵ This is a 4.5% increase over the 2000 Census for an average annual increase over the seven years of approximately 0.75% per year, compared to Colorado's increase over the same period of almost 1.98% per year.

Poverty rates for some San Luis Valley counties are some of the highest in the state. The key economic driver is agriculture (37.9%), while economic activity created by retirees contributes a full 21.4% to the economy, tourism and public assistance account for another 11.5% each.²⁶

Supported by the work of the San Luis Valley Resource Development Group, along with the development of solar and other green technology in the region, many believe that the SLV's economy will continue to grow.

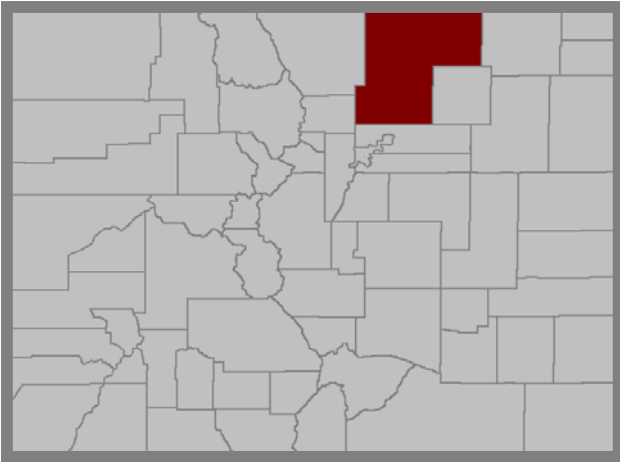
Through the generous donation of time, materials, and funds, hundreds of people help support the San Luis Valley's 476 registered non-profit's with assets in excess of nearly \$300 million.²⁷ People in the southwest region of Colorado (the six county San Luis Valley and the six county Southwest Colorado areas) exceeded both the national and state averages for charitable giving as well as all other Colorado regions.²⁸ Although Costilla County's giving (3.2%) was slightly below the state average of 3.4%, the towns of Monte Vista (3.9%) and Alamosa (4.4%) were far above the average, and, in fact, exceeded the giving of all locations throughout their region, the country, and the state. Also notable is the town of Manassa (located in Conejos County). With a population of only about 1,000, its citizens lead all cities and towns in Colorado by giving an impressive 9.7% of their income to charity.

While voter turnout varies by county, the SLV turnout in 2004 (89%), 2006 (72%), and 2008 (73%) far exceeded that for the U.S. (55%, 37%, 62%), and meets or exceeds the states' (89%, 63%, 70%).²⁹





E. Weld County



Weld County is a semi-arid, agricultural county located in north central Colorado. The eastern portion of the County is level, while rolling prairies and low hills are found near the western border. County elevations range from 4,400 to 5,000 feet. The Colorado counties of Larimer, Boulder, Adams, and Logan border it on the east, west, and south, while Wyoming and Nebraska border on the north.

Greeley, the county seat, is located in the west central part of the county, sits at the crossroads of two major highways, and serves as the industrial, service, and retail center for the County. Thirty additional incorporated towns are within a 20 to 30 miles radius of Greeley. The remaining portion of the County is sparsely populated.

Although agriculture historically has been the economic driving force for the County, it has invested considerable resources on a focused, proactive, strategically designed, coordinated, matrix of initiatives to ensure its continued development in a manner that enhances the quality of life for everyone.³⁵ A key growth area has been renewable energy such as wind power. During the 1st Quarter 2008 the County's largest major industry sector was manufacturing (13% of the employment), followed by construction (10%), and retail trade (10%).³⁶

Weld County is home to 1,036 registered non-profit entities with assets in excess of \$1.2 billion.³⁷ According to Ken D'Amato, Director of Leisure Services for Greeley, "The City of Greeley's Leisure Services alone recorded over 58,000 hours of volunteer time by the community in support of quality of life activities."³⁸ Hundreds of additional volunteers of all ages contribute thousands more hours of service to a wide variety of important initiatives throughout the county.

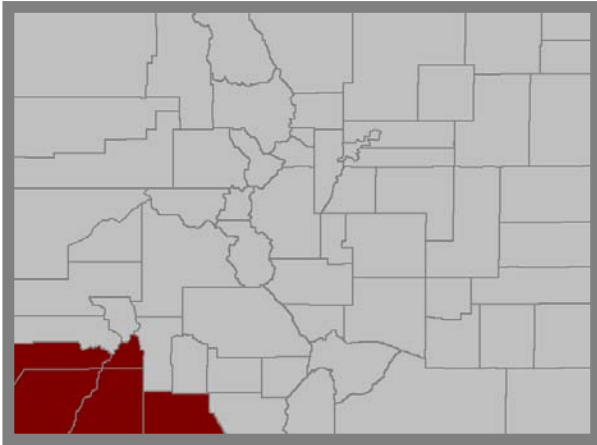
Residents are particularly proud of the nature and extent of the continuing work of the faith community to ensure the well being of everyone in the County through a volunteer run volunteer center, enhancing multi-agency communication and coordination, providing training and mentors for non-profit organizations, encouraging civic engagement, and supplying direct service to those in need.³⁹ During 2005, Weld County residents contributed 3.4% of their income to charitable causes, which is identical to the state and well above the national average (3.6%).⁴⁰

Weld County voters consistently turn out in larger numbers than does the state or nation. In 2004, 90% of voters voted compared to Colorado's overall 89% and the U.S.'s 55%. While there was a more modest county turnout (68%) in 2006 when compared to the state (63%) and the nation (37%), its 92% turnout in 2008 was significantly above both the state (70%) and nation (62%).⁴¹





F. Southwest Colorado



Southwest Colorado is located in the “Four Corners” where four states meet: Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona. Situated in a transitional zone between the southwestern edge of the Rocky Mountains and the eastern edge of the Colorado Plateau, 88,838 residents called it home in 2006. The region covers 6,584 square miles across five rural and frontier counties: Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan as well as the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian reservations.³⁰

The five-county region is varies widely by topography, economics, race, culture, politics, population density, and size. The majority of its population is concentrated in a few cities and towns scattered throughout the five counties. Many consider Durango (the La Plata County seat) the hub of Southwest Colorado because of its services, size, centrality, and highway crossroads.

Highly significant contributors to the Four Corners area are the two contiguous Native American tribes: Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute. These two tribes are sovereign nations, and as such, function separately from Colorado government, but are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. government.

The tribes have their own constitutions, tribal codes, courts, and police force, as well as separate social services and tribal resources.

Southern Ute Tribal lands contain many natural resources (extensive gas reserves, coal, timber, and agriculture). Sitting on one of the world’s richest deposits of methane found in coal seams, the Southern Ute Tribe controls about 1% of the nation’s natural gas supply. The Tribe has made significant economic investments throughout the West, is Southwest Colorado’s largest employer, and has made considerable public service donations.

The Ute Mountain Ute reservation (993 square miles) is situated in part of three states: Colorado (Montezuma, La Plata counties), New Mexico, and Utah. The Tribal capital of Towaoc is in Montezuma County, 11 miles southwest of Cortez. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe maintains oil and gas resources, and has developed an extremely successful construction company, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Park, and a highly acclaimed pottery factory. As of 2005 the Tribe provided 1,130 area jobs, making them one of the largest employers in Montezuma County and a significant contributor to Southwest Colorado’s economy.³¹

Historically, the major industries in Southwest Colorado have been mining, agriculture and forestry. Replaced by tourism, today, those industries account for less than 3% of employment related earnings for this area.³² Archuleta, La Plata, and San Juan county economies are based primarily on low wage tourism and retail trade jobs. Agriculture related services and forestry remain significant sources of employment for Dolores and Montezuma counties.



Southwest Colorado residents contribute thousands of volunteer hours helping local individuals, families, neighborhoods, governments, schools, and other good causes through its 817 registered non-profit entities with assets of nearly \$655 million.³³ Although percentages vary by county, generally, the percentage of income donated to charity by Southwest Colorado residents (3.3%) is slightly below the U.S. (3.6%) and state averages.³⁴

Voter turnout also has varied widely by county, from a high of 86% in San Juan in 2008 to a low of 51% in Archuleta in 2006. For the years 2004, 2006, and 2008, Southwest Colorado voter turnout (85%, 69%, 77%) is nearly equal to the state (89%, 63%, 70%) and considerably above the nation (55%, 37%, 62%).





Key Findings

A. General Findings

Each community is working hard to develop collaborative solutions to the complex and varied issues they face today as well as those anticipated in the future. Assessment participants agreed that they have achieved much in the past.

While communities want help from “the outside,” most reported that the kind of support they want is the provision of resources (and even change rules/regulations) so that they can take care of their issues themselves. Supports needed to help them move farther down the track toward expanded service, volunteerism, and civic engagement included assistance to:

- ✓ Identify local solution-based leadership.
- ✓ Conduct more in-depth community assessment of strengths and needs.
- ✓ Develop and implement community- strengths- and needs- based strategies (immediate and long term).
- ✓ Train non-profit directors/managers (e.g., How to develop and maintain a non-profit, working with the community and other non-profits).
- ✓ Engage and coordinate school systems to “grow your own,” teach civic responsibilities.
- ✓ Improve funding to develop innovations and sustain programs that demonstrate success.
- ✓ Increase consistent, high quality, relationships, and collaborations between state government and local communities.
- ✓ Expand public awareness about the importance of community service, available opportunities, and positive role models and reward good agencies/people/communities --- especially to encourage youth to become civically active.
- ✓ Increase local interagency communication and collaboration.
- ✓ Enhance statewide appreciation for individual counties and areas.
- ✓ Increase capacity by sharing reports and best practices.



B. Key Findings by Category

The needs assessment investigated communities in relation to seven categories that were within the scope of the GCCS to address: civic engagement, conservation/environment, services for people with a disability, early childhood, education, health/health care, and youth development. Although all issue areas are interconnected, they are presented here as discrete categories to highlight core concerns.

1. Civic Engagement

Colorado communities cannot function without civic engagement. The very existence and survival of schools, faith communities, governments, and businesses depends in large part on citizens donating hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours as well as millions of dollars and material resources. Most who volunteer do so in a time limited, issue specific manner. That is, many people will turn out to paint a room or plant a tree at the local homeless shelter but far fewer volunteer to mentor a child for a year.

Communities want to identify, recruit, train, and sustain more local leadership across all sectors. That leadership is seen as essential to build and maintain networks that increase information and resource sharing among organizations while enhancing collaborative initiatives and increasing the number of people who are civically engaged.

- ✓ Increase local leadership
- ✓ Increase coordination within and across sectors
- ✓ Establish a volunteer center / network
- ✓ Increase number of volunteers
- ✓ Increase number of volunteers who provide long-term services



2. Conservation and the Environment

Topping the list of conservation / environmental concerns is *WATER*. Because of local consumption practices, diminishing local water levels, water use “upstream,” and damage done by invasive plants such as tamarisk, there is concern about the decreasing quality and quantity of water. Also on the list is concern about how to produce, and perhaps market, more low-cost environmentally friendly energy to fuel farm machines, cars, and trucks and to provide power for businesses, hospitals, and homes. Safely disposing of hazardous and noxious waste that has been produced in the past, is now being produced, and that will be produced in the future poses significant challenges to the health and well being of communities. In forested areas, there is also much concern about the current and long-term impact on the environment, humans, animals, plants, and the economy of such things as the bark beetle and root diseases.

- ✓ Increase resources to eradicate invasive plants, insects, and animals (e.g., tamarisk, pine beetle, zebra muscle)
- ✓ Increase resources to boost the health of the environment (e.g., thin out trees that may be a fire hazard)
- ✓ Increase resources to enable the public to more easily access recreational opportunities (e.g., maintain trails, build trails for people with mobility impairments)
- ✓ Increase public education and awareness concerning conservation and environment protection
- ✓ Increase resources to assist at risk families, low-income families, and homeowners improve energy efficiency and water conservation.





3. *Serving People with Disabilities*

Definitions of what constitutes a physical, mental, cognitive and sensory “disability” varies widely. Additionally, the only state or county level data about the number and age of people with one or more disabilities is found in the self-reported U.S. Census. While there exists some 2005-2007 data for major urban areas, the most recent data for rural and frontier counties was collected in 1999. This data may not accurately reflect current populations.

Limited information exists about the nature and extent of disabilities that people are living with. The only data available is collected by agencies serving particular populations or people with a specific disability (e.g., developmental disability, veterans, below poverty level) about the people they serve in a particular geographic location, and the numbers they turn away. Even without concrete statistics, community members have enough data and know their communities well enough to recommend areas for improvement.

- ✓ Collect data on the numbers of community members who have a disability along with the nature of the disability and extent to which it impedes
- ✓ Increase the capacity of agencies to serve people with a disability
- ✓ Increase employment opportunities for people with a disability
- ✓ Increase access to civic engagement for people with a disability (e.g. transportation to/from events, work, college classes)
- ✓ Increase public knowledge and acceptance of people with a disability





4. Early Childhood

A high quality and effective early childhood care and education system is fundamental to the long-term health and well being of a community. Quality early childhood programs pay off by providing a foundation for a more educated and engaged populace, an industrious workforce, as well as higher productivity and profits for business, which, in turn produce increased tax revenues and a more stable economy.

Early childhood care and education are becoming increasingly important in this changing economy. Among factors affecting children are: the frequent necessity for both parents to work in order to meet basic family needs; increasing numbers of grandparents raising their grandchildren; and children suffering lifelong injury as a result of the family violence, substance abuse, mental health problems, and poverty around them. Communities identify eight main needs:

- ✓ Increase the quantity of early childhood licensed providers throughout the region – even in sparsely populated rural and frontier areas
- ✓ Increase the types of early childhood providers (e.g., 24 hour availability, wider range of ages accepted)
- ✓ Decrease the turnover in childcare providers
- ✓ Increase initiatives that work with families (e.g., Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters -- HIPPYCorps).
- ✓ Increase child immunization
- ✓ Provide support for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren
- ✓ Decrease cost of services for children
- ✓ Increase child care provider salaries



5. Education

Communities need engaged citizens who possess advanced thinking and skills to address the complex problems they face today as well as those that lie ahead. Citizens must be able to understand the implications of personal actions as well as government and business policies at multiple levels so they can develop thriving communities, advanced communications systems, smart technology, superior leadership, and a sound economy. Providing access to and support for good education and training from pre-school through graduate school is a key means to achieve these important community goals. Some key needs identified by communities to ensure an educated citizenry include:

- ✓ Increase the number of tutors
- ✓ Increase teacher salaries
- ✓ Increase the number of mentors
- ✓ Identify why children, youth, and adults drop out of school (all grade levels) and provide resources to address those factors
- ✓ Increase school to work programs
- ✓ Increase technical training opportunities for youth
- ✓ Increase educational and training opportunities for employees





6. Health / Health Care

Communities across the nation are becoming less healthy as rates of obesity, diabetes, and a host of other, mostly preventable, diseases and conditions rise at alarming rates. Some key contributing factors include: poor nutrition, insufficient exercise, over exposure to the sun, intentional injuries from family violence, substance abuse, increase in numbers of elderly, decrease in the number of health care providers, increase in the number of injured veterans returning to their families and communities, and decreasing access to health insurance. These issues are more profound in rural areas. To address health issues, communities identified the following key needs:

- ✓ Increase number of health care providers (e.g., general practitioner, specialist, LPN, RN, aides)
- ✓ Increase participation in healthy lifestyles
- ✓ Increase access to health insurance
- ✓ Increase services for elderly and people with a disability (e.g., Meals on Wheels, transportation to community functions or to a health care provider or to work)



7. Youth Development

Based on the proposition that all youth need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence, positive youth development refers to the strategic activities of other youth, adults, government agencies, businesses, non-profits, schools (e.g. whole communities) to actively engage youth in contributing to community well being. Activities also serve to expand each youth's interests, skills, and abilities.⁴²

The ultimate goal is for youth, and later the adult, to be more empowered and engaged in their own personal development, as well as with their families and communities. Communities report that too many youth do not develop their full potential due to multiple and interconnected issues: alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use (ATOD); teen pregnancy, school dropout, mental health issues, and unemployment. Community-specific resources needed to help increase positive youth development include:

- ✓ Increased number and types of structured youth activities (e.g., recreation centers, sports teams, civic clubs, cultural awareness programs)
- ✓ Free or low cost transportation to youth activities and civic events
- ✓ Funds to subsidize the cost of positive youth development activities (e.g., funds for materials for cultural awareness projects, uniforms, or to cover fees to participate in a youth leadership workshop)
- ✓ Increased resources to provide youth with job training and employment
- ✓ Increased number and variety of mentors
- ✓ Increase youth leadership opportunities
- ✓ Increased resources to help those involved with mental health, substance abuse, juvenile justice, and social services agencies





Implications for Action

A. Introduction – The new economic reality

Over the next few years, local and state governments, businesses, community non-profit organizations, social services agencies, education, human services and civic organizations will face unprecedented challenges.

The key findings of the community needs assessment report are intended to inform the GCCS, government entities, non-profit organizations, businesses and communities about civic engagement and “new service solutions” – identifying key strategies to address some of the most pressing social, human, and economic issues of our time.

Research for this report began in March 2008, well into the 2008 recession, but long before the staggering economic “meltdown” of the 2008-2009 recession was upon us. In the fall of 2008 and early winter of 2009, as research for the needs assessment was winding down and follow-up visits to local communities were being held, the nation’s top political leaders and economists began to provide more detailed information about the extent, severity, and social impact of the economic downturn facing the nation.

In light of the current economic crisis, the GCCS policy and program priorities, and recommendations for direction over the next three years are seen through a *new* prism, focusing more attention on community service solutions dedicated to support children and families at-risk, job-seekers, returning veterans, struggling non-profit direct-service agencies, and other social and economic community needs that may have just recently surfaced.



B. Service strategies for employment and economic recovery

The Governor's Commission on Community Service will direct staff resources to assist Workforce Centers in serving job seekers through volunteerism and community service. Two specific new program initiatives are planned:

GOAL 1: Enhance Volunteerism. With the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) improve and enhance "volunteer opportunity" web site information to assist job seekers in using volunteer referral service opportunities as an integral part of the comprehensive job search activities. In the current labor market, volunteer service can be used by job seekers to:

- ✓ Improve networking and exposure
- ✓ Strengthen job skills, and practice new occupational skills
- ✓ Explore new occupations and potential career options

GOAL 2: Provide Technical Assistance. With CDLE and county Workforce Centers, using AmeriCorps and VISTA resources, provide technical assistance to develop "volunteer coordinator" functions in local workforce centers, expanding job search services to returning veterans, including disabled veterans; ex-offenders, baby-boomers, new college graduates, displaced workers, and other categories of job-seekers.



C. Strategies by category

The GCCS has matched the needs assessment findings with current and projected resources to develop specific goals for the seven identified service area categories.

1. Civic Engagement - Promoting volunteerism, community service, and civic engagement:

The Governor's Commission on Community Service will direct financial and staff resources to promote volunteerism, civic engagement, and community service as a part of a broader, multi-faceted strategy to develop local leadership that is responsive to local community needs.

GOAL 1: Statewide Volunteerism Campaign - Increase the number of Coloradans in service, and increase the volunteer support to community non-profit organizations through a statewide promotional campaign. This year-long multi-media campaign will elevate the role of volunteers in sustaining community organizations, promote the role of volunteers as the catalysts for positive community change, and support a higher level of recruitment, training, retention, technical assistance, support, and recognition for volunteerism throughout the state.

Special emphasis in the campaign will be targeted to young social entrepreneurs who will be encouraged to take on leadership roles in community problem-solving, thereby developing local leaders across all sectors in the community as well as returning veterans and people who have recently lost their jobs.

GOAL 2: Volunteer Centers - Assist in developing an expanded volunteer center infrastructure across the state, with special emphasis targeted to rural, remote, and underserved communities. The goal is to engage and empower Coloradans to fulfill the "Colorado Promise" through direct service in their communities.

This initiative will, on a pilot basis, establish new volunteer service projects in target communities across the state, including campus based projects, and assist in an increase, over three years, of up to four new volunteer centers in high priority areas, beginning with one demonstration site. The volunteer centers will join the existing Colorado Volunteer Center Network to serve underserved communities not now served by a local volunteer center. The local volunteer center will provide the following:

- Create a community-based volunteer outreach and matching service to recruit volunteers of all ages and match volunteers with the volunteer service opportunities and priority needs identified by the communities.
- Create and maintain a Non-profit Directory – Community Resource Guide.
- Provide orientation, education, training and community workshops for new volunteers, to build sustainability and a pool of long-term, well-trained and dedicated community volunteers.
- Conduct corporate and business community outreach to encourage business support and private investment in local services and encourage local philanthropy.
- Engage local college students and young adults in volunteer service, coordinating student volunteer programs with community needs.
- Engage baby-boomers in community and volunteer services, using skills, talents and experiences of newly retired baby boomers in service to meet community needs.



- Promote civic engagement inclusion of, and promote increases in direct community services to, people with disabilities.
- Support the Colorado State Emergency Operations Plan, in conjunction with the Colorado Division of Emergency Management and supporting agencies to serve as the coordinating agency to ensure the effective and efficient use of unaffiliated volunteers and unsolicited donations during emergencies and disasters;
- Serve as a catalyst to support resources to local communities for community planning, needs assessment and advocacy for strengthening communities through volunteer service, engaging the non-profit private sector in meeting community needs.
- Develop and promote service learning in elementary, middle schools, high schools and college and to serve as a site for college internships; identify and assist in service-learning curriculum development to be used with the school based programs.

2. Conservation and the Environment

The Governor's Commission on Community Service will continue to direct AmeriCorps*State resources, to the greatest extent practical, in areas that promote energy conservation and water efficiency, through the allocation of AmeriCorps*State funds to organizations such as the Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) and in partnership with the Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA).

GOAL 1: AmeriCorps support for energy conservation and water efficiency will be maintained as a top priority service area. AmeriCorps support for MHYC and the CYCA provides significant support for energy conservation and water efficiency services for low-income, elderly and people with a disability across Colorado. AmeriCorps members provide direct service to assist residents to reduce energy costs and improve water use efficiency.

Through youth corps programs and other programs, AmeriCorps members provide the following energy and conservation direct services. Many of these community-based services serve low-income neighborhoods and households, the disabled, and the elderly.

- Install compact florescent bulbs
- Install low flow shower heads
- Assist households with energy savings measures
- Install high efficiency toilets
- Install carbon monoxide detectors
- Improve state trails and campgrounds
- Remove tamarisk (invasive plant species)
- Maintain urban park areas for neighborhood recreation in central city areas
- Construct and maintain community gardens.

GOAL 2: Expand community service activities in the areas of environmental protection, energy conservation and water conservation.



3. *Serving People with Disabilities*

Colorado communities expressed an interest in learning more about service needs and community services (both needs and gaps) for people with disabilities. The Governor's Commission on Community Service will continue its "disability awareness and inclusion" initiatives to promote services and encourage broader community inclusion and civic engagement for people with disabilities.

GOAL 1: Maintain current GCCS service initiatives: In 2008 – 2009 the GCCS implemented a strategy to expand community awareness of the abilities and community service capacity of people with disabilities by providing direct grants to partner organizations to:

- Partner with other organizations to increase referrals and applications by people with a disability to AmeriCorps with a resulting increase in the numbers of people with a disability who become AmeriCorps members. Increase the quality and quantity of supports for AmeriCorps members with disabilities;
- Create a statewide working group to develop and implement strategies to recruit and retain persons with disabilities in service positions and to ensure positive experiences;
- Sponsor training sessions for and with AmeriCorps* State and AmeriCorps* National programs to educate program staff and AmeriCorps members on ways to increase participation of individuals with disabilities;
- Provide financial incentives to modify or enhance program activities or deliverables to help defray the costs of achieving "disability and awareness" program goals.

GOAL 2: Share best practices: The results of this work will assist the GCCS in promoting boarder strategies, sharing best practices and developing more focused program initiatives to serve people with a disability. Best practices venues include:

- GCCS State Disability Grant Report
- GCCS Newsletter
- GCCS Mid-Year and Annual Reports
- Program Mangers' Institute
- State Service Conference
- Day of Service promotional campaigns including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service and Colorado Cares Day

GOAL 3: Expand the network of the GCCS partner agencies that are routinely engaged in advocacy and services delivery for people with a disability. Assist these agencies in developing civic engagement initiatives to serve their program participants as well as their partner organizations. Community service partner organizations include:

- Creative Training/Accelerating Talent Disability Inclusion Training
- Colorado Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities
- Colorado Cross-Disabilities Coalition
- Metro Children's Center
- Colorado Disability Economic Initiative
- Colorado Division on Aging, Colorado Experience Bank
- Black United Fund of Colorado
- Disabled Cycling Program
- Denver Metro CPRC's in Transition



4. Early Childhood

To promote services and directing resources in support of early childhood care and education, the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* (early.childhoodteam@capitol.state.co.us) released in 2008 established the following policy goals for Colorado's young children and their families:

- Children have high quality early childhood learning supports and environments and comprehensive health care.
- Families have meaningful community and parenting supports.
- Early childhood professionals have the knowledge, skills and supports to work effectively with and on behalf of families and children.

GOAL 1: Increase initiatives that work with families, such as the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters – HIPY Corps program.

5. Education

Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. and Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien are strong advocates for education improvement. As a result, broad, comprehensive education reform policies are well underway throughout the state. The GCCS will leverage resources from current statewide and local education initiatives to address three specific education needs identified by communities to:

- Increase the number of tutors.
- Increase the number of mentors.
- Increase school-to-work programs.

GOAL 1: The GCCS will embark on a new program initiative, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education, to develop the Colorado Statewide Mentoring and Tutoring Partnership. The purpose of this program is to serve as a catalyst to:

- Establish and sustain a statewide youth mentoring collaborative partnerships with direct-service mentoring programs.
- Build increased organizational capacity, community support, and resources for mentoring and tutoring.
- Expand mentoring services in underserved areas, specially those serving at-risk school age children living in poverty.
- Link service-learning and mentoring. This will tie school curriculum with meaningful community volunteer service, to mentoring to engage community adults as mentors, and students, in community service as a vehicle for mentoring, career exploration, and skill development.



6. Health/Health Care

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is a recognized leader that sets the agenda for public health and environmental quality in the state. As such, it works closely with local public health and environmental health partners to make Colorado the healthiest place to live. Through enhanced community service and volunteer activities, the GCCS will leverage resources from current statewide and local health initiatives to address four health issues identified by communities to:

GOAL 1: Increase participation in healthy lifestyles – GCCS and partner agencies, including grant recipients and sub-recipients, Learn and Service, will embark on new “service strategies” to promote “healthy lifestyles” among all groups, especially children and families. GCCS will actively promote healthy lifestyle, recreation and health and wellness initiatives in all AmeriCorps*State – funded programs, and assist in technical assistance and “best practices” strategies.

GOAL 2: In partnership with the Lt Governor’s Office initiatives, other state agencies and other partner organizations, GCCS will actively promote and support activities and events that highlight existing community awareness campaigns, such as:

- Colorado Kids Outdoors
- National Get Outdoors Day
- 50th Anniversary of State Parks in 2009
- “No Child Left Indoors”
- GCCS Statewide Service Day promotions, including Colorado Cares Day
- LiveWell (Kaiser Permanente, Colorado Health, etc.)

GOAL 3: Increase volunteer and community services for the elderly and people with disabilities, including Meals-on-Wheels, volunteer transportation services, senior “day care”, respite service and other support services for the elderly and disabled.

GOAL 4: With the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division on Aging, assist in promoting “healthy lifestyles” for baby-boomers and maturing adults, through volunteering, lifelong learning, and employment and community services.

7. Youth Development

Youth development services are those community support, guidance, educational and employment opportunities that help increase positive adolescent and youth development, and serve to prevent school dropout, alcohol and drug abuse, juvenile and criminal behavior, teen pregnancy, and other behaviors that limit opportunities later in life. Youth development programs are a long-standing program priority of GCCS and AmeriCorps*Sate programs.

GOAL 1: GCCS is committed to continue youth development service programming to help meet the youth development and community needs identified in the needs assessment process. Program initiatives will continue in;

- Job training, team building, and service learning
- GED enrollment, preparation and tutoring
- Youth mentoring and tutoring, and peer mentoring
- Independent living skills instruction in subjects such as budgeting, employment and job-seeking skills, education, conflict management, personal hygiene, healthy lifestyles, recreation
- Youth leadership development, including crew leader development program (CLDP) and Education and Outreach Program (EOP) in youth corps programs.





Summary

The Colorado Community Needs Assessment on Volunteerism and Civic Engagement offers new data and a fresh perspective on community needs and potential community service policy and program goals needed to meet these needs.

A. "State Service Plan" Development

This report will be used by GCCS as the basis for developing the next Commission on Community Service 2009-2011 three-year State Service Plan, to be completed in November 2009. This plan will articulate state service goals and priorities based on the priority needs, with the plan that state AmeriCorps will be directed to meet high priority needs. In addition, this report will be used to assist other agencies, local and regional community foundations, non-profit organizations, and local educational and social service agencies, as well as government entities to direct their response to these needs.

B. Continuing Existing Programs

In many respects, the needs assessment report confirms that most GCCS program priorities are appropriately directed to serving local community needs in civic engagement, disability services, conservation and the environment, early childhood care and education, education, health and wellness, and youth development. Where these programs are currently serving high priority needs, these programs will continue.

C. New Service Strategy Initiatives

To the greatest extent possible, GCCS will re-direct existing resources, seek new resources and build strategic, collaborative partnerships to advance programs that meet new and emerging needs as expressed by local communities. These new initiatives include:

- Launch a statewide civic engagement and volunteerism campaign.
- Expand volunteer center infrastructure support.

- Expand services and new initiatives in sharing best practices involving services to the disabled.
- Increase resources and services regarding early childhood care and education.
- Expand youth mentoring and tutoring collaborative programs.
- Develop volunteer and community service opportunities for job seekers and workforce centers.
- Direct service opportunities for returning veterans, and other targeted population groups such as new college graduates, baby-boomers, veterans with a disability, ex-offenders and others.

D. Passage of the Kennedy Serve America Act

With passage in March 2009 of the Kennedy Serve America Act, new and expanded AmeriCorps resources will be available to states and state commissions over the next five years. This act will:

- Expand AmeriCorps to over 250,000 annual participants in five years;
- Establish five new service corps programs: Education Corps, Clean Energy Corps, Healthy Futures Corps, Veterans Corps and Opportunity Corps;
- Establish the new Serve America Fellowship Program
- Increase the amount of the education award, thereby increasing incentives to AmeriCorps service.

These expanded resources will provide the funding and program support needed by the Governor's Commission on Community Service to meet the service goals identified in this report.

This study offers program goals and public-private collaborative strategies to strengthen Colorado's communities and improve the lives of children and families for many years to come.



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ABSTRACT:

This report describes the process, county profiles, results, and next steps of a one year, community-based, participatory research / needs assessment concerning civic engagement conducted in six Colorado communities by the Governor's Commission on Community Service (GCCS) from 2008 – 2009. The GCCS, under the Office of Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien, serves as a catalyst for the promotion and expansion of community service and volunteerism to all Colorado residents as an effective means to address civic and social issues and improve the overall well being of communities throughout the state.

The GCCS studied civic engagement issues and the six target communities, designed and implemented a protocol, held community forums and small group discussions, conducted interviews, analyzed data, and identified community assets and needs. Key research findings show that, although participating counties vary widely on a number of dimensions, they all have core strengths by which they have weathered difficult times and continue to build. While communities agreed upon many priorities within each of seven needs assessment focus areas, generally, their broader needs center around assistance with recognizing community priorities; developing and nurturing leaders and sustainable funding; identifying, implementing, and maintaining best practices to address community priorities, civic engagement, and collaboration within communities and between state government and communities. This process taps community resources, builds on local capacities, educates about civic engagement, and empowers participants as active partners in expanding thriving communities.

Next Steps: Continuing to use this evidenced-based, participatory research, the GCCS will develop and implement a three-year State Service Plan to effectively allocate federal and state resources that meet community needs, enhance civic engagement and promote volunteerism and community service.

KEY WORDS: Alamosa County, AmeriCorps, civic engagement, Archuleta County, Colorado, community, community-based needs assessment, Conejos County, Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Costilla County, Governor's Commission on Community Service, Dolores County, La Plata County, Mesa County, Mineral County, Montezuma County, participatory research, Prowers County, Pueblo County, Rio Grande County, Saguache County, San Juan County, San Luis Valley, Southern Ute Tribe, Southwest Colorado, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, volunteer, volunteer center, Weld County



Governor's Commission on Community Service
Office of Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien
225 East 16th Avenue, Suite B-52 • Denver, Colorado 80203
Phone: 303.866.6426 • Fax: 303.866.2525
www.colorado.gov/gccs
governors.commission@state.co.us