



# Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Grow Your Own Part 1



## Empowering Communities for Success

### INTRODUCTION TO THE GROW YOUR OWN WORKFORCE SERIES:

In an era marked by dynamic economic shifts and evolving job markets, the concept of "Growing Your Own Workforce" has emerged as a transformative approach to building thriving communities. This series of articles aims to explore this innovative concept from various perspectives, highlighting examples of regional organizations that have successfully implemented the "Grow Your Own" philosophy to strengthen their workforce from both community and organizational standpoints. Herewith our findings:

### PART 1: Empowering the Community: Colorado Mountain College Nurtures Local Talent for a Strong Workforce



Colorado Mountain College (CMC), a leading educational institution serving the entire NWCCOG region, with three full-service residential campuses and eight community campuses, stands as an exemplary model for listening to workforce needs, adapting curriculum to place their students in a position for those opportunities.

CMC's various campuses cater to the unique needs of their respective communities. Some campuses are focused primarily on the needs of local commuter students, while others, like Leadville, have more traditional residence halls and offer specialized programs like ski area operations, avalanche science, and a fire academy, drawing students from outside the district and generating additional economic benefits. This tailored approach ensures that CMC upholds its overarching mission while serving as a catalyst for individual and community growth.

In recent years CMC became accredited to provide Bachelor of Science and Associate [nursing degrees](#) to campuses in Spring Valley at Glenwood Springs (2006), [Steamboat Springs in 2020](#), and [Breckenridge \(2022\)](#) that cumulatively [graduated 75 nurses in 2023](#). The State of Colorado's Career Advance Colorado program provides most of the cost of academic programs for programs in Teacher Education, Early Childhood Education, Fire Science and Law Enforcement, some sectors with perennial understaffing across the region. With each program, the college collaborates closely with community partners in that sector.

The college closely reflects the diversity of the community that hosts each campus. They are an excellent example of the "Grow Your Own" concept at the macro level. About 97% of students at the CMC Edwards campus are considered "in district education opportunities," according to Marc Brennan, Ph.D., Vice President and Campus Dean at CMC Edwards, who shared insights with NWCCOG recently on how that campus has embraced this approach and collaborated with the community to identify and address workforce needs. The CMC organization prides itself on pairing these students with local

opportunities. To do so, they are responding to evolving community needs and providing adaptations to show for it. One key strategic alignment with the needs of the medical field enables CMC to provide training programs that lead to stable, well-paying careers.

“Community partnerships are a cornerstone for CMC as we work to provide relevant courses to support growing industries. To determine areas of unmet workforce needs, we actively engage with the community,” says Brennan. They have been actively doing so in Eagle County [since 2016](#) when they began offering a surgical technology degree and others. Through such collaborations with community partners such as Vail Health, which VH highlighted in a newsletter in [December of 2019](#) titled “Growing Our Own”,



CMC was able to identify the need for radiology technicians. CMC seized the opportunity and began the process of researching necessary certification criteria, curriculum requirements, pre-requisites, accreditation, staffing requirements, etc. The process from idea to inception, they learned, can be quite lengthy. These positions are one of the top needs identified by CEOs from Vail Health, Middle Park Health and Aspen Valley who spoke at the 2023 NWCCOG Economic Summit which was reported on in the [May 2023 Newsletter](#). One of the challenges is to find the right faculty who can create the program from start to finish. The healthcare industry generates a lot of interest since people know it provides good, stable jobs, with growth potential. However, there are limited numbers of openings in each area – for example nursing, which is offered by CMC in Breckenridge, Glenwood Springs, and Steamboat Springs.

When asked about how CMC receives requests from the community, Brennan highlighted the role of their advisory board. “We have an advisory board made up of community members,” he explained. “Someone will approach CMC and the advisory board to suggest we consider offering certain classes.” This open line of communication allows individuals to voice their needs and preferences regarding educational offerings. Brennan further noted that people frequently reach out to advisory board members with requests, although it’s not always feasible to implement every suggestion. “Sometimes the request can be fulfilled, but sometimes it just doesn’t make sense,” he added. At other times the program may be offered at a different campus. For example, the Bachelor of [Integrated Media, added in Spring Valley in March of 2023](#) – is a need in Edwards – but Spring Valley already has the curriculum. So rather than duplicating the course, CMC provides space for remote learning. Almost all classrooms have the capability of including other campus classrooms remotely so students can be physically in one location but can take classes in a different location.



Though many commute from home or earn credits while still in high school, CMC students are not immune to the cost of housing. Another adaptation to student needs is addressing one of the primary hurdles to a college degree in the mountains – affording a place to live; so In June of 2021 CMC announced a \$40 million dollar commitment to add 36 units at 4 campuses as reported in the [Colorado Sun](#). The college is aware of needs across the spectrum of employment from work requiring a bachelor’s degree to others which require specific classes or a certificate. During our interviews NWCCOG learned that the ‘trades’ also need qualified well-trained workers, we asked

Brennan about that. “Because we know not all students who graduate from high school want to continue to traditional college,” he explained, “we offer trade classes as dual enrollment with the high schools. Programs like, automotive technicians, welding, and carpentry, which are all offered on high school campuses around the region to help prepare graduating seniors to have a leg up in certain trades skills.”

While CMC strives to have diverse programs attended by people with a diversity of backgrounds in the community, certain classes can only be offered in certain locations. For example, the [automotive certificate](#) is currently only offered at the high school in Gypsum because that is the only location that has the faculty and equipment to teach that program. Unfortunately, the number of students who were interested in taking that program needed to be capped due to the number of instructors available. Despite these challenges, completion certifications empower students with enhanced skills, increasing their employability and earning potential.

Interestingly, while working hard to help deliver career advancement to students and helping to fill workforce needs to the community, CMC has its own workforce challenges when it comes to finding qualified faculty and staff. To address this, they are building housing designed for students, which may also accommodate faculty, aiding in attracting and retaining talented educators.

As the series looks further into the “Grow Your Own” concept, the story of Colorado Mountain College exemplifies the successful implementation of this approach on a larger scale. By working closely with community partners, addressing workforce needs, and continuously adapting to meet diverse demands, CMC has created a thriving ecosystem where students are equipped with the skills they need to succeed

while strengthening the regional workforce as a whole.



This series was conceptualized and initiated by Jon. The content presented here includes interviews and stories which were created by Jon. The editing of the series was primarily performed by Jon, with valuable contributions and collaboration from the interviewers involved in each story. However, any errors or inaccuracies that may be found within the series are solely my responsibility .

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