



White Paper: The Future of the NWCCOG Economic Development District Program

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SUMMARY:

Executive Director: I have wanted to restructure NWCCOG EDD, much like some of other Cogs around the state, with a more integrated strategy that integrates multiple NWCCOG programs and interacts with the region more actively. With Rachel stepping away from this job after establishing the District more than a decade ago and Anita talking on and off for 9 years about retiring, the time is ripe to look at options for the program beyond simply posting with the same job description and looking for someone to replicate Rachel's skills. I asked Rachel to reach out to stakeholders and come up with some options as part of her transition.

Background:

The purpose of this white paper is to evaluate the NWCCOG Economic Development District/Program and to explore options for possible changes to the structure and operation of the program.

SECTION I: What NWCCOG EDD Does

What does the EDD do?

NWCCOG Economic Development District exists to connect our communities with resources, build partnerships, and foster regional collaboration to enhance the economic prosperity of our region.

History:

In 2009, our region and nation was in the midst of a recession. Results of the member needs survey that year reported that the number one need of the region was:

Assistance with the economic downturn and associated issues: budget constraints, reduced revenues, long term sustainable funding, unemployment (particularly in the construction industry), maintaining a quality workforce during difficult economic times, funding capital projects, and economic development and diversification away from dependency on resorts and tourism.

In response to this need, NWCCOG applied to the Economic Development Administration to become a federally-designated Economic Development District. In order to maintain EDD status and receive annual funding from EDA, NWCCOG must create and maintain a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS), report on it annually, and update it every 5 years.

- October 22, 2009 – NWCCOG Council directs staff to apply for EDA planning grant to develop CEDS and seek EDD status
- April 1, 2010 - \$35,000 grant from EDA to develop first CEDS
- August 17, 2012 – NWCCOG officially designated an EDD by the EDA
- 1st CEDS: 2012 – 2016
- 2nd CEDS: 2017 – 2021
- 3rd CEDS: 2021- 2026
- 4th CEDS: will begin planning September 2025; will cover 10/1/26 – 9/30/31

Annual Funding and Required Match

NWCCOG EDD has had one staff person managing the program since its inception in 2012. Over the last 13 years of the program's operation, costs have increased each year (salary increases [merit + cost of living adjustments], indirect costs, program expenses) however the amount of the annual EDA funding has remained stagnant at \$70,000/year. The EDA grant requires a 1:1 match, therefore over the last 2 years NWCCOG has had to "overmatch" the program to cover the EDD budget. Due to this fiscal issue, it is a good time to evaluate the structure of the EDD and consider possible changes.

Future funding for EDDs and Reauthorization of EDA

Funding for the EDA Planning Partnership Program which provides NWCCOG with annual funding seems to be secure at this time. There are no indications from our EDA Denver Region staff that funding is in jeopardy in this time of cuts to federal grant programs. In fact, for the first time in 20 years, Congress has reauthorized the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). On January 4, 2025 the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024 (Senate Bill 4367) was signed into law, following its passage in the House and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support. Title II of the

legislation, the *Economic Development Reauthorization Act of 2024*, reauthorizes the EDA. The legislation strengthens and protects EDA's programs and enhances key initiatives that are vital to the success of Economic Development Districts and other EDA stakeholders across the country, while also bolstering many of the core traditional programs that EDA has administered ever since it was originally authorized in the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. Key provisions of the reauthorization include increased funding for EDDs and reduction in match requirements.

As of FY 2024, Congressional appropriators only provided \$34.5 million overall in actual appropriated funding for Partnership Planning. Divided among the approximately 400 EDDs that currently exist, and among other eligible stakeholders, this level of funding translates to approximately \$70,000 per EDD. This is barely enough to cover one full-time staff person to fulfill planning responsibilities and complete deliverables that are mandated by EDA.

If appropriators were to provide Partnership Planning funding at the level of the authorized by the recent reauthorization, which is \$100 million for FY26, this would allow each EDD to receive closer to \$250,000 per organization, which would finally allow for sufficient staffing and funding to carry out planning responsibilities that are mandated by EDA. However, In order for the authorized funding levels to be provided to Economic Development Districts, Congressional appropriators would still need to provide appropriated levels of funding that are equivalent to the authorized amounts. This has not yet happened. We will know more in early 2026 which is the time we should be invited to apply for our next 3-year grant.

The EDD Program Grant

EDD program activities are outlined in the EDA-authorized scope of work in the Planning Partnership Grant. This scope of work is developed when applying for PPG funds every three years. NWCCOG EDD's current grant covers the period 4/1/23 – 3/31/26, thus NWCCOG will be invited to apply for the next three-year grant sometime in early 2026. During the application process, the scope of work for the next three years of EDD operations will be developed with input from the EDD board of directors.

Appendix I: Current EDD SOW

SECTION II: PROCESS SUMMARY

Over the course of the last two weeks, the EDD Director has had 1:1 interviews with several EDD board members to garner input on the EDD program and its future. Specifically, the EDD Director asked each board member: what is the value of the EDD program to your community specifically? To the region as a whole? What improvements can be made? Do

you have any suggestions for changes in how NWCCOG funds and operates the EDD program? This input is to be a starting point in the discussion on possible changes to the EDD program. We will be having a discussion with the full EDD board, as well as the NWCCOG Council in upcoming Council/EDD board meetings.

EDD board members interviewed:

- DiAnn Butler, Economic Development Director, Grand County
- Patti Clapper, Commissioner, Pitkin County
- Chris Romer, President & CEO, Vail Valley Partnership
- Erin McCuskey, Eagle County Economic Resiliency & Northwest SBDC
- Corry Mihm, Board Members, Summit Chamber of Commerce
- John Bristol, Executive Director, Routt County Economic Development Partnership
- Kris Mattera, Executive Director, Basalt Chamber of Commerce
- Carolyn Tucker, Industry Engagement Team Lead- Western Zone, Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium
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Summary of Feedback

1:1 Interviews

- All those interviewed found value in the EDD overall, and were in favor of continuing the program
- Number one thing mentioned when asked about the value of the EDD was it provides a forum for information sharing, collaboration, opportunity for partnering on projects to avoid duplicative efforts, and working on solving problems we all face as a region instead of working in our own silos all doing the same thing; having conversations about problems we all face (housing, childcare, cuts to staff on federal lands, immigration issues, etc.)
- Value in EDD being a conduit to state/federal funds that may be available in the future
- Value of EDD: serve as regional point of contact for statewide initiatives (CO|Align; Regional Talent Summit; Statewide Destination Stewardship Plan, etc.)
- There is value in staff of EDOs in the region to interact with elected officials; they don't get many opportunities for this
- Some communities have an economic development organization in place in their county, with full-time staff, funding, and programming so NWCCOG EDD is valuable for the information sharing and collaboration mostly (Routt County, Grand County)
- Another important function of EDD is education and elevation of awareness of "what is economic development" and why do you invest in it; sometimes this message does not get back to county commissioners/town councils who are the policy makers who make budget decisions

- EDD should get more proactive in programming that seeks to increase primary jobs/industries and industry diversification
- The annual Economic Summit is a cornerstone program – a “must do”
- The EDD Resources Bulletins are extremely valuable in compiling grant opportunities, training opportunities, and other economic development resources in one place
- Quarterly economic reports are very valuable
- Workforce data presented by CDLE at board meetings very valuable

Ideas for future of EDD:

- There is an opportunity to pool resources under EDD rather than each county trying to sustain their own economic development organization
- Use contractors for data reports (one example mentioned was an economist and/or professor from Colorado Mountain College)
- Use contractors for CEDS update, regional reports (Regional Workforce Housing report), research and studies as needed
- More proactive on seeking out regional grant opportunities, garnering support, getting matching dollars together, writing the grant
- Grant writing – actual writing of grants for regional projects: writing, managing the grant – shared resource (like elevator program)
- Breaking down silo between NLF and EDD - NLF is an economic development program, yet reports directly to the NWCCOG Council. That structurally is strange and disjointed.
- Bring external dollars into our region to help small businesses; have a grant pool to help businesses fund new inventory, new product line, new storefront, etc.
- Programming to educate investors on dynamics of the communities in our region; the high net work individuals we attract given the many amenities; programming on angel investing,
- Grow NLF program under umbrella of EDD; seek out funding to grow NLF (eg – EDA Revolving Loan Fund program)
- Incorporate temporary role of Regional Grants Navigator when it expires, providing Technical Assistance to local governments navigating diverse grant landscape of federal grants from agencies other than just EDA.

SECTION III: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Based on feedback from 1:1 interviews and researching other EDD structures across the state, the following scenarios were developed for discussion purposes. These are meant to get the conversation started and there will be a more robust discussion at future NWCCOG Council and EDD board meetings over the next several months.

Scenario A: No longer operate EDD

Steps:

- Reject the Grant, tell EDA not running District SOW
- Don't accept the \$70,000 from EDA
- Cease to operate the EDD District
- Absorb some of what EDD was doing into NWCCOG as a whole (resources bulletins, data reports, etc.)

Executive Director Notes Scenario A:

Disadvantages

- Makes the region ineligible for some EDA funding, and
 - Largest impact to Grand County
 - Recent grants have included Aspen CORE, Summit Economic Partnership, Climax Mine
 - No option if funding from EDA increases,
 - or if COVID-type special funding occurs
- Disconnected from agency.
- Scenario not supported by the 1 on 1 interviews or by staff.
- Keeps options open in a changing federal funding landscape with other programs

Advantages

- No 2026 Budget
- Allocation from Dues of \$80,000 can be used for other programs
- Reduces Indirect Revenues by \$16,000
- Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments has no EDD but is considering it

Scenario B: Status Quo, Hire EDD Director

- Same job description.
- Different job description
- Hire at lower point on wage range (\$78,269 - \$117,404 plus COLA in 2026)
- Hire at top of wage range or negotiated which could require increased match from Dues

Current job description:

Executive Director Note Scenario B:

I do not intend to simply post this position "as is" with the same JD without exploring ways to add value. For instance, the next EDD Director should travel and interact across each of the Counties, attending meetings and events with local stakeholder agencies. As other Scenarios suggest, some administrative aspects of the job will likely be contracted out since they now absorb an inordinate amount of the Director's time (without an admin), and the data reporting can likely be programmed to auto populate quarterly with AI, so the EDD Director would be expected to add value by providing commentary on the data. Generally, this will be a more outward-facing position.

Estimated Budget Scenario B: Status Quo

Revenues	
EDA Grant	\$ 70,000
NWCCOG Match	\$ 80,000
Total	\$ 150,000
Expenses	
EDD Director	\$ 96,000
EDD Director benes	\$ 40,000
Travel & Meetings	\$ 500
Indirect	\$ 15,840
All Other Expenses (office supplies/postage/program expense/rent)	\$ 1,500
Contract Work (CEDS Upate, Research, Reports)	
Total Expenses	\$ 153,840
Revenues/Expenses	\$ (3,840)
Amount NWCCOG ED Charges to Grant	0
Net Cost to EDD program from Regional Business	\$ 80,000

NOTE Budget could Increase in 2026: Program has been operated with bare bones expenses, but with increased travel and community interactions would expect need for travel and meetings budget which could be \$10,000, office setup/rent \$5,000, vehicle \$8,000.

“Status Quo” could easily be a cost increase situation of \$25,000 or more depending on many factors.

Scenario C1: Executive Director Manages Program

This model is like other regions who hire a Coordinator or a Contractor. Perhaps EDD meeting is re-absorbed into NWCCOG Council meetings. Only required to meet once each year, could convene board like NLF or Foundation. Or Board could be more active and absorb leadership role with a supporting coordinator.

Executive Director Notes Scenario C:

A number of other COGs have Executive Directors selected for their experience and interest in Economic Development. That is not a strength of this ED so this would essentially be "EDD lite." This may not be a bad way to ride out the current uncertainty. Can ride out situation and eventually overhaul NLF and EDD when an employee transition occurs.

Estimated Budget Scenario C:

Revenues	
EDA Grant	\$ 70,000
NWCCOG Match	\$ 70,000
Total	\$ 140,000
Expenses	
EDD Coordinator	\$ 70,000
EDD Director benes	\$ 25,000
NWCCOG Executive Director salary	\$ 20,000
NWCCOG Executive Director benes	\$ 2,000
Travel & Meetings	\$ 2,000
Indirect	\$ 14,850
All Other Expenses (office supplies/postage/program expense/rent)	\$ 6,000
Contract Work (CEDS Update, Research, Reports)	
Total Expenses	\$ 139,850
Revenues/Expenses	\$ 150
Amount NWCCOG ED Charges to Grant	\$ 22,000
Net Cost to EDD program from Regional Business	\$ 48,000

Historical Note:

Before Indirect funded a Finance Department and we had major expenses for IT, and other platforms, NWCCOG performed wage range analysis that recommended increased EDD Director wages. As they grew the share of EDD that was charged to Executive Director time has reduced from more than 30% of ED wages to zero burdening Dues and Indirect.

Scenario D: Independent Contractor as Coordinator

For reference, Scenario D is similar to HCC, NWAHEMR, I-70 Coalition.

Scale back program & hire Independent Contractor 24hr/week w/ NWCCOG ED oversight.
Use contractors for research, reports, data, depending on needs of the EDD

Executive Director Note:

This could look much like Scenario C, but the focus on research and reports suggests that this person would be more of a data analyst with some design skills who could also build reports that the Executive Director has handled mostly unilaterally in recent years. This could still involve significant facilitation of regional EDD information sharing and collaboration, but may not come with the same EDD expertise.

Estimated Budget Scenario D:

Revenues	
EDA Grant	\$ 70,000
NWCCOG Match	\$ 70,000
Total	\$ 140,000
Expenses	
Contractor (24 hr/week @\$78/hr)	\$ 90,000
NWCCOG ED salary (oversight only)	\$ 18,000
NWCCOG ED benes	\$ 4,000
Travel & Meetings	\$ 6,500
Indirect	\$ 2,970
All Other Expenses (office supplies/postage/program expense/rent)	\$ 5,000
Contract Work (CEDS Update, Research, Reports)	\$ 10,000
Total Expenses	\$ 136,470
Revenues/Expenses	\$ 3,530
Amount NWCCOG ED Charges to Grant	\$ 22,000
Net Cost to EDD program from Regional Business	\$ 48,000

Scenario F: Whole Enchilada

Integrate EDD with NLF and BB – and look for opportunities to expand program

Executive Director with 9 employees in EDD

The Region 9 Economic Development District Executive Director oversees and directs all aspects of the organization, focusing on regional economic development and strategic planning for Southwest Colorado. The role involves collaboration with public and private sectors to improve the region's economic prosperity, manage the organization's operations, and ensure successful implementation of economic development strategies.

Proven track record in economic development and program management.

Strong leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Experience in strategic planning, financial management, and grant writing.

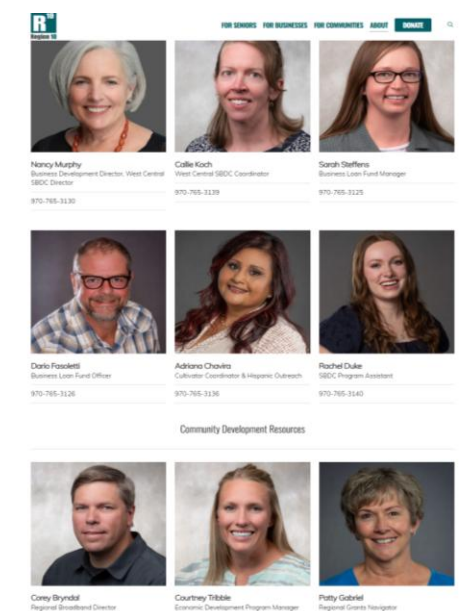
Knowledge of regional economic development issues and best practices.

Ability to work effectively with diverse stakeholders.

Proficiency in relevant technology and software applications.

Ability to travel within the region and occasionally out of the area.

ED Team under Region 9 Executive Director



Example II: Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation

Executive Director

(Abilene, KS) The Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation is seeking a strategic service-driven leader to serve as the Executive Director of this well-funded, county-wide economic development organization.

The selected candidate will report to a committed Board of Directors and will serve exclusively in this full-time, professional position. The position will drive business recruitment, retention, and expansion, and they will oversee the development and implementation of a strategic economic plan, manage community development initiatives, and build strong, lasting relationships with local, regional, and state officials and organizations.

The Executive Director will be tasked with building a strong staff team to address BR&E projects as well as workforce development and talent attraction for this thriving central Kansas community. This organization has a committed Board of Directors and an enthusiastic group of more than 75 private investors. The Executive Director will enjoy the opportunity to realign the strategic direction of this organization. Abilene is the county seat of this central Kansas community located along the I-70 corridor. Abilene is also the home of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Visitor Center.

Executive Director Note:

This change is an opportunity to restructure ED as an umbrella for NLF, Broadband and Research at NWCCOG that was not possible with existing staff. This might have implications for a change in NLF staffing. Aspects of this will be under consideration with all of the Scenarios.

“Estimated” Budget Scenario F

Revenues	
EDA Grant	\$ 70,000
NWCCOG Match	\$ 70,000
NLF Loan Interest Revenue	\$ 240,000
NLF Bank Interest Revenue	\$ 20,000
Total	\$ 400,000
Expenses	
Economic Development Director (oversees NLF and EDD)	\$ 110,000
NLF Program Coordinator	\$ 70,000
EDD Director Benes	\$ 30,000
NLF Coordinator Benes	\$ 20,000
Travel & Meetings	\$ 20,000
Indirect	\$ 29,700
All Other Expenses (office supplies/postage/program expense/rent)	\$ 20,000
Contract Work (CEDS Update, Research, Reports)	\$ 30,000
Total Expenses	\$ 329,700
Revenues/Expenses	\$ 70,300
Amount NWCCOG ED Charges to Grant	\$ -
Net Cost to EDD program from Regional Business	\$ 70,000

NOTE:

There has been chatter at Regional EDA office that the Federal Government may drastically increase funding to regional EDDs just as there has been chatter about the entire federal program being shuttered. Increases mentioned put EDA funding per region alone at \$400,000. Combined with Loan Fund revolved funds and interest that is quite a war chest for making strategic impacts. Some EDDs also have private partners in local businesses as stakeholders who contribute to the budgets.