



A Preliminary Proposal for NWCCOG Board Consideration – 7/6/2023

An Overview of the Project

The following discussion provides an introduction to a proposal from Insights Collective (IC) to the NWCCOG to assist in developing a Community Assessment System. For more than a year, the IC group has been communicating with COG staff regarding opportunities for new tools and metrics to respond to changing economic conditions and new economic forces that have emerged. Some are an outgrowth of COVID 19, some are pre-existing issues that have amplified, and others may have resulted from sources that are not yet fully understood or measured. These discussions resulted in a series of interviews with NWCCOG members and others, and the gradual formulation of a survey to test the need and opportunity to explore new ways of measuring and interpreting changes that are impacting local economies. The goal has been to evaluate these forces in relation to Colorado communities and the programs and initiatives of the NWCCOG.

This proposal is based on the premise that the interviews and survey research to date suggest that it is possible to use an analytical approach and management techniques to:

1. Clarify and measure the extent to which:
 - a. The post-Covid economy and related forces have shifted the mindset of some resort community residents, and more specifically to a preference for a greater emphasis on tourism management and mitigation and less on tourism promotion, and;
 - b. These changes are reflected in new and different plans, goals, and priorities that are identifiable and measurable by responsive civic leaders, and;
 - c. These changes are evident in some but not all communities and warrant validation, and;
 - d. Communities can be identified where changes have occurred (for example, in tourism objectives, management approaches, budgets, organizational schemes, etc.), and examining the degree to which these results will be informative, and
 - e. Testing/confirmation of interest from NWCCOG constituents will provide a foundation upon which a broader and more ambitious study can be undertaken.
2. In response to identified changes, historical funding, marketing, legacy research, and associated metrics may no longer be viable and should be re-visited and updated as needed.
3. There is a recognition that there have been a series of major initiatives to examine some of the topics identified herein, including work by multiple agencies of the State of Colorado, Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST), and others and this work deserves attention. There may be opportunities for partnering and/or consolidating findings so that the ultimate result is a narrowed and agreed upon set of “best practices” for widespread use.
4. A unique opportunity exists for NWCCOG to add value to its members by leading/funding this initiative. It also presents an opportunity for members of the IC team who, by virtue of their authorship of traditional research and measurement tools, are well qualified to develop viable research and to interpret research findings to potentially facilitate implementing such systems as they are developed.
5. Through such efforts, the IC team (and NWCCOG) will provide actionable recommendations and advice to assist interested parties in achieving community development objectives and ensure

better overall decisions by using the proposed Community Assessment System for characterizing towns, cities, and counties throughout the development process.

Specific elements of proposed Grant Scope: Jan – April 2024

1. Research/validate assumptions above.
2. Research, identify, and begin the development of new metrics and associated “tools” to be adopted by communities as part of an assessment system. A key deliverable from the research will be a Community Metrics Survey effort that builds on preliminary surveying conducted by IC/NWCCOG during May and June 2023. The survey program will be designed to be a quantitative benchmarking means of measuring communities in relation to Guest-Centric versus Resident-Centric metrics and ongoing alignment with data needs and policy / development goals of the community. The result of the analysis is anticipated to be uniquely descriptive of individual participating communities.
3. Preliminary survey data strongly suggest that there are emerging forces in communities calling for increased attention to the quality-of-life factors as important considerations in shaping public policy. These diagnostic measures will be identified and quantified as a particular focus of the proposed research.
4. The results of the development work will be directed toward a **Community Assessment System** by which communities can measure where they are, where they have come from, and most importantly, where they want to go in the future, then track their progress towards that goal.
5. The research will result in a qualitative assessment of the quantitative results describing all participating NWCCOG constituent towns using standardized survey questions. Measures for individual towns and comparisons to the aggregate profile of all members will be provided, and appropriate benchmark measures will be suggested.

A possible outgrowth of this project is that individual communities will use the findings to address what they have learned to enhance and focus community and economic development objectives. The expected uses of the information might include broad scale adoption of findings in multiple communities with guidance from NWCCOG to address changes in the overall economic environment and new forces that can be measured and addressed to benefit communities. Additionally, there is the potential to use the grant to further partnerships with the multiple agencies that are working on community development projects ranging from tourism development and management, to resiliency, workforce housing, etc. The grant could further spur action toward applications that might include for example:

- Reviewing current policy documents for alignment with the findings from the research.
- Comprehensive or strategic plans, sustainability studies, tourism and destination marketing plans, and economic development initiatives at the local level might all be considered in light of findings related to the Community Assessment tools.
- Outreach to local community leaders including workshops, information resources on best or best/appropriate practices, and advice in a variety of forms might result.

At the conclusion of the effort supported by the grant, attention will be given to potential next steps and identifying actions to further the application of research findings to the needs of NWCCOG members as well as other communities throughout the region.

The Data-based Foundation of the Proposal

It is notable that this proposal is based in part on research conducted over the past four months that has provided a preliminary assessment of some of the ideas that will be fully explored in the proposed work program. Specifically, the Interviewing Process and the Resulting quantitative Community Metrics Survey provide some initial findings that support the overall direction of this project.

- **The Interviews Conducted by Jon Stavney and IC staff.** A total of over 40 conversations were conducted with leaders in member communities from within the NWCCOG region as well as additional interviews with selected other parties. These discussions resulted in testing opinions on five questions related to current experience with economic development including tourism-related programs, as well as providing a measure of potential interest in the IC project that is currently being proposed. The interviews found that among community leaders:
 - There is a strong belief that in many communities there has been a greater focus on managing tourism and less on marketing. – 70% report they are seeing these shifts
 - There are divided opinions on the magnitude of trends related to marketing and whether they will reflect a shift in the economic foundations of communities over time - 55% said yes they were expecting major shifts, 45% said no.
 - Many communities are experiencing tensions between long-time local and newcomers that play out in a variety of ways – 70% report they are seeing these conditions emerge.
 - There is generally strong support for NWCCOG pursuing a project to provide metrics for these trends, to track community adaptations, and build a toolbox of ideas – 90% indicated interest.
- **The NWCCOG Community Metrics Survey Preliminary Results.** The survey fielded in May/June provides additional data to support the proposal to the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). These results are reported under separate cover, they provide information that suggests the potential need and opportunity for the types of metrics and tools that are being researched through this proposal.

About Insights Collective:

The Insights Collective is a travel economy think tank conceived in 2020 – in response to the Covid Pandemic – and formalized in 2021 as a Colorado Non-Profit corporation. Its mission:

“... At the Insight Collective, we explore big strategic issues and their impact on the tourism industry. With our collective think tank approach that integrates multidisciplinary skills and experience, we develop strategic frameworks, ask thought provoking questions, and apply unique approaches to challenges facing public sector and tourism industry clients. Our goal is to provide actionable ideas for an ever-changing environment and increasingly competitive world. “

Comprised of a group of like-minded travel, research, and strategic planning companies, the Collective brings extensive experience, a broad skill set, and well-established relationships with many NWCCOG member communities and stakeholders. The Collective recently presented a live-interactive presentation at the NWCCOG 2022 Economic Summit. The “Forces At Play” discussion was well received and prompted collaborative sessions with NWCCOG leadership about the changing marketplace and the initiative for which the DOLA grant is being applied.

The Collective includes members who are industry veterans, generally recognized as thought leaders and subject matter experts in the destination resort community marketplace. Collective members have been instrumental in establishing destination resort-community metrics that became de facto industry standards for measuring and managing resort community tourism economies. The Collective team is uniquely qualified to lead a re-assessment of foundational metrics upon which the emerging “new realities” of the post-Covid economy are dependent.

As such, we are confident they are a good match and, assuming our grant application is approved, look forward to contracting with them this fall, beginning work in January 2023, and are targeting a May presentation of results and recommendations for the May 2023 NWCCOG Economic Summit.

For more about Insight Collective:

[Website](#)

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