

Proposal

to Conduct "What Keeps Mayors Up at Night" Research Project

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Submitted to: Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG)

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Phase I: Initial Research & Analysis (\$20,000 Budget)

Project Overview

The Insights Collective proposes a research initiative titled "*What Keeps Mayors Up at Night*", aimed at identifying and analyzing the key challenges and concerns facing mayors within the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) region. This project will provide actionable insights to NWCCOG and its member municipalities, ensuring that regional strategies align with the most pressing issues facing local leaders.

This study builds upon NWCCOG's ongoing efforts to provide data-driven insights for municipal leaders and bring it forward to the a rapidly evolving economic and political environment of 2025. Previous studies by NWCCOG helped leaders make sense of and provided actionable data. The Mountain Migration report studied the changes brought by the influx to the high country, specifically how it impacted the rental and ownership housing markets, leading to dramatic actions by many governments in the following years. The Regional Assessment of the Childcare Industry was utilized by community groups in three counties to form community planning groups. Last year's Community Metrics project established a structure for local leaders to make sense of and act to rebalance community needs between residents and long-term visitors. This project complements those previous studies on economic forces, tourism shifts, and governance challenges, ensuring that insights gained are not only informative but also actionable. Much like the COVID experience, uncertainty at the federal level is impacting states and has hit the "subconscious" of Mayors who are tasked with contemplating the future for their respective communities. NWCCOG's previous reports have stemmed from input from the Membership, and from the Executive Director performing interviews with all Municipal and County managers in the region to begin to track trends and identify emergent issues. This year it was thought that a similar systematic effort to gather qualitative data from Mayors would be a launchpad for coming strategic initiatives at a regional level.

Project Objectives (Phase I)

A key addition to this process will be a Preliminary Findings Review session with a small advisory group of mayors. This will allow early insights to be validated before finalizing recommendations, ensuring alignment with real-world governance challenges.

Identify Top Concerns

- Conduct structured interviews with mayors and municipal leaders to gather qualitative insights.
- Develop a tailored set of questions, record responses, and transcribe key themes, strategies, stated possible actions.

Analyze Trends and Regional Issues

- Synthesize interview and survey data to identify recurring themes and pinpoint challenges unique to different municipalities.
- Compare findings with external economic and demographic data.

Provide Strategic Recommendations

- Develop a set of practical recommendations based on identified challenges.
- Benchmark against best practices from other regional and national municipalities.

Enhance Collaboration and Engagement

- Facilitate discussions with municipal leaders through follow-up surveys or small-group sessions to validate findings.
- Ensure that the research reflects real-world concerns and priorities.

Research Methodology (Phase I)

The research will be conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of mayoral concerns:

Stakeholder Interviews: One-on-one structured interviews with 7-10 mayors to gain in-depth perspectives on local challenges. Interviewees will be selected based on municipal size, regional diversity, and scope of responsibilities to ensure a representative sample.

Survey Distribution: A structured survey sent to up to 25 NWCCOG mayors to gather comparative data on key issues. The survey will include both quantitative and open-ended responses to provide measurable insights while capturing nuanced perspectives.

Deliverables (Phase I)

Comprehensive Report – A full research report summarizing key findings, trends, and strategic recommendations. This report will include visual representations of data, such as charts and comparative insights, to make findings more accessible and actionable

Preliminary Findings Review – A collaborative discussion with a small group of mayors to validate early insights before finalizing recommendations.

Executive Summary & Presentation – A concise document highlighting major takeaways, along with a presentation for NWCCOG stakeholders. The presentation will include an interactive Q&A session to ensure clarity and applicability of the findings.

Beyond the research report, findings will be integrated into a structured discussion with NWCCOG members to explore real-world applications. This will ensure that insights lead to concrete actions, whether through policy recommendations, leadership training, or future research phases.

Timeline (Phase I)

The proposed research will be conducted over a **12-week period**:

- **Weeks 1-2:** Project kickoff, stakeholder outreach, and survey development. Draft interview questions and survey logistics will be finalized.
- **Weeks 3-6:** Data collection (interviews and surveys). Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy, while survey responses will be continuously monitored and analyzed for trends.
- **Weeks 7-8:** Preliminary Findings Review – Discussion with selected mayors to validate early insights.
- **Weeks 9-10:** Analysis and synthesis of findings, including coding qualitative responses, developing comparative analysis tables, and cross-referencing results with existing regional reports.
- **Weeks 11-12:** Report writing, final presentations, and strategic recommendations. A review process will ensure clarity and accuracy before presentation.

Concept Planning for Phase II – In-Depth Study of Key Issues Identified

Phase I will establish a foundational understanding of mayoral concerns. Though a deliverable from Phase 1 will synthesize and package findings as noted, it is anticipated that some identified emergent issues, challenges or opportunities may be “new” issues that have not already been as thoroughly studied and acted upon as some issues in the past such as “workforce housing.” An emergent issue example from the past 5 years was the emergence of Short Term Rental and the regulatory response. If intriguing such issues emerge, it is anticipated that NWCCOG could propose as a follow up to phase one, a deeper dive which could take various forms. A potential **Phase II** could include:

- In-depth case studies of key issues identified in Phase I.
- Policy development workshops with municipal leaders.
- Pilot programs to test key recommendations in selected communities.

The scope of Phase II will be determined based on **initial findings and stakeholder priorities**.

Conclusion

The *"What Keeps Mayors Up at Night"* research project will help NWCCOG better understand the challenges facing municipal leaders. The findings will support **informed decision-making, improve policy strategies, and strengthen regional collaboration**. By ensuring that insights are **validated, actionable, and aligned with NWCCOG's broader initiatives**, this project will provide lasting value for member municipalities.

We look forward to collaborating with NWCCOG to advance this important research initiative.

Mayor Interview List: Ensuring Geographic and Economic Diversity

Mountain Resort Towns

Tourism-driven economies with seasonal workforce issues and housing pressures.

- Vail
- Breckenridge
- Steamboat Springs
- Aspen
- Crested Butte
- Avon
- Grand Lake
- Winter Park
- Telluride
- Snowmass Village

Rural Agricultural / Resource-Based Towns

Lower tourism activity, stable populations, and smaller municipal budgets.

- Walden
- Kremmling
- Hayden

Fast-Growth Residential Towns

Growing year-round populations with mixed-use development and infrastructure demands.

- Eagle
- Gypsum
- Granby
- Silverthorne
- Basalt
- Frisco

Interview Outline for "What Keeps Mayors Up at Night" Research Project

Objective: To identify and analyze the key challenges and concerns facing mayors within the NWCCOG region based on interviews with a sample of seven community representatives. This discussion is intended to be the first step in a larger effort to reach out to a broader group of mayors (and potentially other elected officials) to ask questions like those discussed in this interview, "What keeps you up at night?"

Interview Duration: Approximately 60 minutes

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Introduce the research project and its objectives.
- Explain the confidentiality and use of the information provided.
- Obtain consent to record the interview.

Section 1: Background Information (10 minutes):

- Can you provide a brief overview of your tenure as mayor and your prior experience in public service? How long have you been in an elected position? Were you involved in other community organizations before becoming mayor?
- What motivated you to pursue the mayoral position in your municipality?
- Briefly, how would you describe the rest of your council or trustees in terms of:
 - Are most of them relatively new to public service, or have they been involved for a long time (say five or more years), or is it a mixture of experiences?
 - In general, would you say your council easily reaches consensus on issues, or is the group often divided on policy and direction?

Section 2: Current Challenges (20 minutes):

All things considered, what are the **three** most pressing issues currently facing your municipality?

(Probe): If all these issues are local, ask about State of Colorado and/or Federal issues. Discuss the initial topics that are identified.

Alternatively, if all the topics are Federal or State, probe why local issues had not been top of mind.

- How have these issues evolved over the past few years?
- Are there specific factors unique to your municipality that exacerbate these challenges?

Section 3: Resource Allocation and Budgeting (10 minutes):

- How do you prioritize budget allocations to address the identified challenges?
- Have there been significant shifts in funding priorities recently? If so, what prompted these changes?
- How do you feel about the status of your Capital funding and asset management? Would you characterize CIP spending as strategic or annually as needed?

Section 4: Community Engagement and Public Perception (10 minutes):

- What methods beyond Council meetings do you engage with the community?
- What strategies have been effective in building public trust and participation?
- Are there particular community groups that are harder to reach or engage?
- Are there particular community groups that regularly challenge Council?

Section 5: Intergovernmental Relations and Support (10 minutes):

- How do you collaborate with other jurisdictions?
- Does collaboration with municipalities, county officials, and state agencies influence your ability to address local challenges?
- Are there specific regional initiatives or partnerships that have been particularly beneficial?

Section 6: Future Outlook and Strategic Planning (10 minutes):

- What are **your** top priorities for coming years? Do they align with staff, council?
- How do you plan to address emerging challenges or opportunities?
- What support or resources would enhance your ability to achieve these goals?

Conclusion (5 minutes):

- Is there anything else you would like to share?
- Thank the mayor for their time and insights.