

Chapter 3: CEDS public, business, and local government engagement

SCEDD is one of the largest geographic Economic Development Districts (EDD) in the nation. The EDD's 13 counties are in four distinct sub-regions with differing economic priorities. This required focused meetings to ensure each of the sub-region's projects, programs, and policies were included in the CEDS update. The SCEDD staff set out a four-phase public engagement plan to ensure that each region had ample time to participate in the CEDS process.

The COVID-19 pandemic impeded SCEDD's ability to conduct traditional public meetings, especially in the early stages of the engagement process. Therefore, a series of engagement steps were formulated over a 6-month timeline to reach the constituents and local elected officials throughout the district. In total, the SCEDD staff conducted 33 local elected officials listening sessions or public kick off presentations and 26 additional separate county-



Baca County CEDS meeting; Local Government Buy-In meeting with City of Springfield Council and Baca County BOCC

level meetings for the SWOT analysis and to formulate the Economic Implementation Strategies. SCEDD was creative with appropriate social distancing, in person meetings and using Zoom to conduct meetings across the district. This meeting tally only measures meetings extremely focused on the CEDS. There were more than 24 additional meetings considering the specific aspects of broadband (entire District) and for workforce housing on the Southeastern Plains. While those meetings are not detailed in the subsequent narrative, they are indicative of the granular level of public participation.

Phase 1: Introduction to CEDS process and local government buy-in

The first phase was introducing the CEDS process to SCEDD's elected bodies within the 13-county district. During this phase, the importance of the CEDS to each community was presented and how they will be used moving forward over the next five years. This step involved a short 10–15-minute presentation during work sessions or regular meetings and included details and timelines of the CEDS process, as well as future goals and plans of SCEDD as an organization. Each community participated in an Economic Development Strategy Survey to determine the top priorities for the CEDS update moving into future phases. This survey allowed SCEDD to begin to understand the

Southern Colorado Economic Development District * 2021 CEDS

impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on local communities, the regional economy, and to guide discussions on how SCEDD could assist with economic recovery efforts.

This phase was conducted with the local elected officials in the following municipalities and counties:

- Town of La Veta
- City of Walsenburg
- Huerfano County
- Las Animas County
- City of Trinidad
- Baca County
- Town of Walsh
- Town of Sugar City
- Prowers County
- Town of Holly
- Town of Wiley
- Town of Eads
- Town of Haswell
- City of Rocky Ford
- Town of Granada
- Town of Springfield
- Crowley County
- Town of Ordway
- City of Las Animas
- City of Lamar
- Otero County
- Town of Silver Cliff
- Town of Westcliffe
- Fremont County
- Canon City
- City of Florence
- Lake County
- City of Leadville
- Chaffee County
- Pueblo County
- City of Pueblo
- Town of Buena Vista
- City of Salida
- Town of Poncho Springs
- Custer County

Phase 2: Discovery

SCEDD staff had the opportunity to begin to understand current economic data, project priorities, community needs, and results from the Economic Development Strategy Survey. During this phase important meetings with organizations, elected bodies, board members, and businesses occurred to ensure that Phase 3 of the CEDS process was tailored to address the economic priorities of the region. Staff arranged meetings with economic development directors and other local government staff members to begin to understand the impacts of COVID and identifying projects to assist with recovery efforts. This was an important time to ensure that SCEDD did not duplicate existing planning efforts. Instead SCEDD staff was charged with reviewing and cataloging information from these plans and data to ensure it informed the CEDS update. This gave the staff the opportunity to understand the needs within each community, potential funding opportunities, and future projects to rebuild the regional economy. For over six months, SCEDD reviewed the following data sets and plans for each county to update the final CEDS.

- Population Data (Census and DOLA demographer)
- Employment Data (U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- COVID-19 County Data (Public Health Departments)
- Regional Industry Data

- Incomes and AMI data
- Tax Revenue Collections (County and Municipal Finance Departments)
- Land use data (County Assessors)
- Identification of key regional amenities, institutions, transportation hubs, and recreation assets
- Infrastructure Districts - Water, wastewater, electric, internet, gas
- Housing Data
- Potential or existing grant opportunities to leverage funding

Finally, this phase allowed staff to make proper accommodations for each community's COVID-19 protocols to conduct safe meetings for Phase 3 of the process.

Phase 3: County SWOT analysis and economic implementation strategy formation



SCEDD conducted two public meetings in each county to formulate the SWOT process as directed by the EDA. Then SCEDD created a set of county-wide, specific strategies for projects, programs, and policies. Public comment and input informed these strategies. These meetings allowed for governmental collaboration and discussions focused on how to begin regional recovery efforts.

Fremont County public CEDS meeting; The Abby Events Center

These 26 meetings created a SWOT analysis and five years' worth of projects to increase the economic prosperity of the district. The schedule for each of the individual county SWOT and economic implementation strategy meetings is below:

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| • Lake | May 28 and June 3 | Bent | April 5 and April 19 |
| • Chaffee | May 17 and June 23 | Otero | April 29 and May 13 |
| • Custer | March 9 and March 23 | Pueblo* | July 27 and August 12 |
| • Huerfano | April 15 and April 28 | Fremont | May 4 and May 20 |

Southern Colorado Economic Development District * 2021 CEDS

- Las Animas May 12 and May 27 Crowley April 6 and April 20
- Baca June 8 and June 22 Kiowa May 11 and May 25
- Prowers June 9 and June 23

*CEDS meetings for Pueblo County and the City of Pueblo were conducted with senior staff

Phase 4: Presentation of recommendations, public review, and elected official check-ins

Prior to the completion of the final CEDS, the draft plan and recommendations were publicly noticed in each of the 13-member county's local newspapers. The plan was also made available for public comment on the SCEDD website for a 30-day public comment period. Input received during the public comment period was considered by the SCEDD Board and based on the Board's recommendations included in the final plan. On September 22, 2021, the SCEDD Board adopted the CEDS five-year update and submitted it for final review to the EDA.