



Mountain West Coal Communities in Transition Update

January 2024

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In 2023, we saw many examples of people and organizations coming together to work in new ways and deepening partnerships in others. As we look forward to working with you in 2024, we look to these inspiring examples.

- ❖ **Plenty Doors Community Development Corporation** rallied its partners at **Little Big Horn College, Apsaalooke Nation Housing Authority, Town of Lodge Grass** and **Wyola Development Fund** to create the “Closing the Gap Coalition” and become a Recompete Pilot Program recipient and Strategic Development Grant finalist.

For nearly four decades at least half of the Crow Tribe’s nonfederal income came from a single source: the Absaloka coal mine. As demand for coal from the mine plummeted, the Crow Reservation has experienced job loss and economic distress. On Dec. 20, 2023, the Closing the Gap Coalition learned it has successfully secured a Recompete Strategic Development Grant of \$549,996, and the opportunity to compete for Phase 2 funding of up to \$50 million to begin rebuilding a tribal-led economy on the reservation. The EDA’s Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program targets the hardest-hit and most economically distressed areas where prime-age (25-54 years) employment is significantly lower than the national average, with the goal to close this gap through flexible, locally driven investments.

To send congratulations and hear how they did it, contact: Charlene Johnson, cfjohnson@plentydoorscdc.onmicrosoft.com.

- ❖ **Navajo, Apache, and Coconino** Counties in Arizona joined together in 2023 to become part of NACo’s **Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities Action Challenge (BRECC)**. Now, with expanded partnerships, they are getting ready to roll out their Regional Coal Transition Strategy.

Three beautiful counties in northern Arizona have joined together to face the challenges from the closures of coal plants across their region. Recognizing the benefits of a regional approach to building and diversifying their economies, they’ve worked together with utility and university partners to identify shared needs, understand regional markets, and find ways to support each other’s priorities. In early February, they head to Washington, D.C., to share their ideas and projects with other BRECC communities, federal agencies, and future partners. Then it’s back to Arizona to hit the ground running and turn strategy into action! **To learn more about BRECC and what these counties did with it, contact: Chris Pasterz, Navajo County Economic Development and Real AZ Director, chris.pasterz@navajocountyaz.gov.**

- ❖ **Four Corners Economic Development** (4CED) in San Juan County, New Mexico, and the **Just Transition Fund** (JTF) joined together in a strategic partnership resulting in technical assistance and \$150,000 in grant funding.

4CED joined forces with JTF to overcome San Juan County's long-standing challenge in pursuing broadband for all who need it: the lack of a coordinated voice to speak to policy makers and with service providers on all things broadband. To fill this gap and unite interests from across the county, 4CED worked with the JTF to secure a funding for a "broadband czar." This new position will bring together local government entities, utilities, utility regulators and regional planners to design, implement, and lead a coordinated San Juan County-focused broadband development effort. **Reach out to Scott Bird, Four Corners Economic Development Interim Executive Director, sbird@4cornersed.com to learn more.**

- ❖ **Colorado's Just Transition Advisory Committee** (JTAC) works together and in partnership with the **Colorado Office of Just Transition** (OJT).

In the last half of 2023, members of Colorado's coal transition communities, coal workers and labor unions, disproportionately impacted communities, economic and workforce development sectors, utility companies, and the state legislature came together as the **Just Transition Advisory Committee** (JTAC) to work with the Colorado's Office of Just Transition (OJT) to develop its second Just Transition Action Plan. The new plan will shape OJT's work in 2024 and beyond to ensure the needs and interests of communities and workers are front and center as OJT, other state agencies, and the legislature move forward to develop programs and secure funding to assist coal communities with their transition.

The new strategic plan offers new programs to supplement those that already exist. One proposal is for OJT to utilize existing funds to offer tuition assistance, small business start-up assistance, peer coaching, and other well-being support to workers and their partners and family members, in the pre-closure environment. In the post-closure environment, the plan envisions securing additional funding to provide retirement gap assistance for workers within 5-years of retirement and health insurance extension, among other programs. We will be watching to see how these ideas pan out and what support the legislature offers. **For more about the JTAC, contact its Chairman, Dennis Dougherty, Executive Director, Colorado AFL-CIO, ddougherty@coaficio.org.**

- ❖ Southeast Utah has created a Utah Interagency Working Group to secure economic development opportunities in Carbon and Emery Counties—with financial support coming from a local business leader and consulting expertise from a Wyoming neighbor.

Neighbors—near and far—are coming together to build a [Utah Interagency Working Group](#) for Carbon and Emery Counties, home to PacifiCorp’s Hunter and Huntington Coal Power Plants. Brock Johansen, CEO of Emery TelCom, provided funding for the working group to hire Dru Bower, a community consultant who has helped Wyoming communities and agencies work together to develop plans and secure funding. Other participants in the group include local mayors and county commissioners, economic development organizations, Rocky Mountain Power, school and community college leaders, federal agency representatives, and others. It’s exciting to see neighbors coming together in new ways to ensure their communities continue to thrive. **To learn more about what is happening in Southeastern Utah, reach out to Stuart Clason, Regional Growth Director, Utah Regional Growth Association (UTRGA), stuart@utrga.org.**

Here are a few more folks who deserve congratulations for recently secured grants!

- ❖ The [Center for Civic Policy](#) in New Mexico and the [Western Clean Energy Campaign](#) in Arizona for their successful grants from the [Just Transition Fund](#) to support the creation of community transition funds in their respective states.
- ❖ [Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado](#) (Craig, Colorado) received \$100,000 grant from DOE to bring together a diverse range of community stakeholders, including local government officials, business leaders, representatives from affected industries, environmental groups, and residents to develop a transformation plan for decommissioning of the Craig Station Power Plant.

Tell us what you’re up to! And for more information or questions about the **Center for the New Energy Economy**, its work with coal communities, or its **Mountain West Coal Communities Transition Updates**, contact Suzanne Tegen or Pam Eaton at cnee_mountain_west_updates@colostate.edu or call 303-601-5431.