



Community partner brief: Building Community Capacity project

Project proposal:

In this project-based course (3 credits), teams of graduate students from the Masters of the Environment (MENV) program at CU Boulder will partner with the [Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office](#), [CSU Extension](#), and the [US EPA's Recreation Economy for Rural Communities \(RERC\) program](#) to provide planning assistance for outdoor recreation and Main Street development for three rural communities in Colorado. Graduate students will take on the role as community consultants and walk their partner communities through a facilitated planning assistance process that is similar to the RERC program, to develop a Community Action Plan for the next 12-24 months.

Project purpose and goals:

The purpose of this project is for graduate student teams to provide planning assistance to rural Colorado communities looking to develop their outdoor recreation economy. While different communities may be in various stages of developing their outdoor recreation economy, all of those selected would benefit from the creation of a comprehensive and holistic plan that outlines key community goals and targeted action items to advance development. This project provides students the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom, while providing partner communities assistance with:

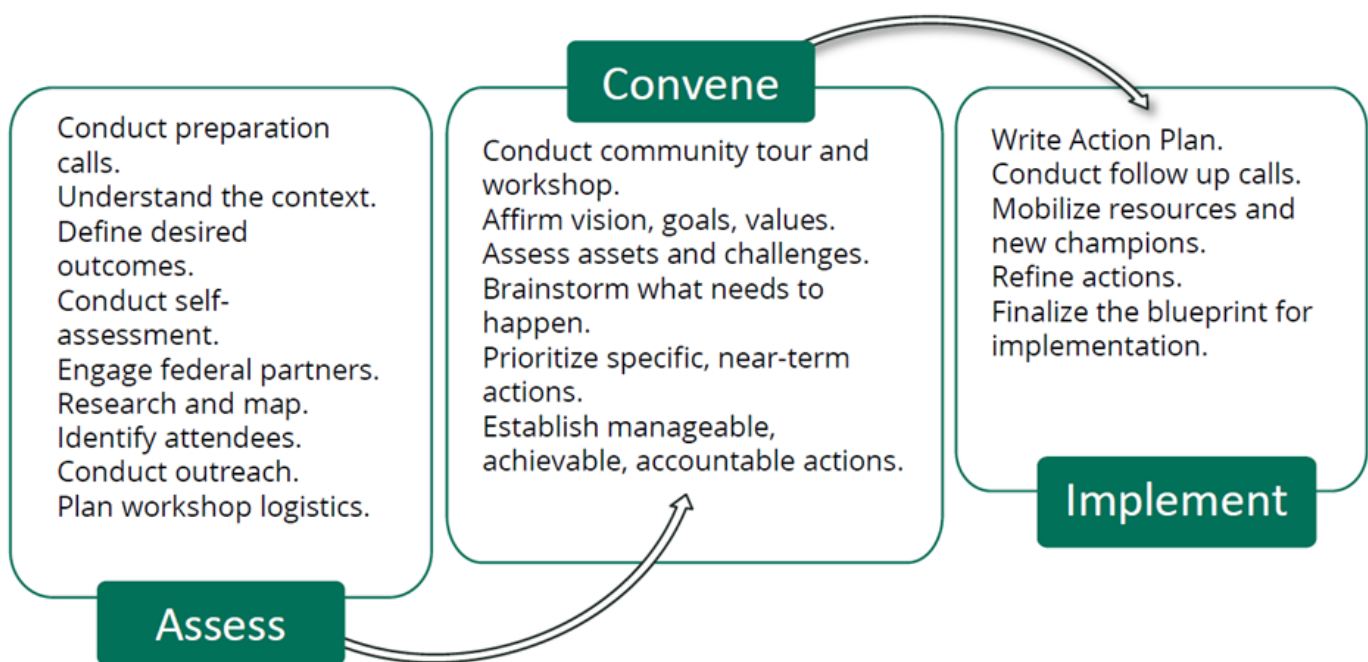
- Comprehensively assessing community assets and strengths through completion of a community self-assessment tool
- Identifying gaps and opportunities for outdoor recreation and Main Street development
- Community visioning and the creation of broad community goals to guide outdoor recreation economy and Main Street development
- Meaningful stakeholder engagement through the facilitation of a two-day, in-person workshop
- Sharing relevant case study examples of the various ways that other communities have developed and invested in their outdoor recreation economy

- Developing partnerships between local, state and federal offices, programs and organizations to support outdoor recreation and Main Street development
- Identifying relevant programs, partners and funding sources to assist with outdoor recreation and Main Street development
- Developing targeted action items and next steps for implementation

Project process:

This project follows a modified version of the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) planning assistance process. Figure 1 below outlines the three key parts of this planning process.

Figure 1. RERC Community Engagement and Planning Process



Source: RERC Community Guide (2022)

Given the time constraints imposed by the academic calendar, the modified RERC process provided will be broken down into the following two phases (within which the above three phases of assess, convene, and implement reside):

Phase 1. Introduction and community preparation (Assess): (mid-Oct 2023 – mid-Jan 2024)

Phase 1 is led by Natalie Ooi, Teaching Associate Professor, CU Boulder and supported by Matt Nunez, Program Manager, Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office (OREC) and Guinevere Nelson, Douglas County Extension Director,

CSU Extension. It consists of:

- Introductory meeting between facilitation team and community point-of contact
- Community steering committee formation
- Introductory planning call with steering committee, facilitation team and state and federal partners
- Community self-assessment

By the end of Phase 1, the following will have been achieved:

- Creation of the community steering committee
- Workshop dates and location are set
- Community self-assessment completed

Phase 2. Community engagement and action planning (Assess, Convene and Implement): (mid-Jan 2024 – start of May 2024)

Phase 2 is led by the graduate student teams and supported by Natalie Ooi, Matt Nunez, Guinevere Nelson, and other state and federal partners. It consists of:

- Mid-January - Beginning of March:
 - Community completes self-assessment
 - 2 x planning calls with steering committee and student team
 - Goal identification
 - Workshop preparation and logistics
 - Promotion of the workshop among community members
- Beginning of March: Community tour and workshop
 - Community tour: Steering committee take the student team and state and federal partners on a tour of key outdoor recreation and supporting assets, areas for development and improvement, and places that communicate the culture and identity of the community.
 - Community workshop: Interactive 2-day workshop hosted by the student team
- March - May
 - 2 x Post-workshop planning calls with steering committee and student team
 - Mobilization of resources and community support
 - Writing the action plan
- Mid-May: Final Community Action Plan is delivered to the community
- Mid-May onwards: Support is provided by CSU Extension to assist community in implementing the Community Action Plan

By the end of Phase 2, the community will have:

- Completed a two-day, in-person community engagement and planning workshop
- A finalized community action plan
- A presentation of the community action plan
- Ongoing support through CSU Extension to implement the community action plan

Project deliverables:

By the end of the spring 2024 semester, students will have completed the following deliverables in partnership with their community:

1. **RERC Community Assessment Tool and stakeholder contact list:** (the onus is on the community to complete these)
2. **Project plan:** Students teams will lay out the scope of work that will be completed alongside their project management approach. This will incorporate a communication agreement between the student team and their partner community.
3. **Facilitated community engagement workshop (in person)** that is focused on:
 - Identifying and prioritizing assets and strengths to achieve outlined priority areas
 - Identifying and prioritizing challenges and barriers that may limit the ability to achieve outlined priority areas
 - Presenting case study examples of relevant options for investing in, and developing, the outdoor recreation economy
 - Identifying and prioritizing community economic development and outdoor recreation opportunities to address identified priority areas
 - Identifying and prioritizing action items and next steps for the community
4. **Final presentation and report** that:
 - Summarizes the community engagement and project process
 - Summarizes and analyzes community input
 - Outlines options on how the community can invest in, and develop, the outdoor recreation economy
 - Identifies relevant programs, partners and funding sources to help the community undertake next steps
 - Outlines prioritized action items for the community
 - Community recommendations for next steps
5. **Implementation funding and guidance**
 - Comprehensive list of funding sources for outdoor recreation and economic development projects from Federal, State, regional, foundation, and business partners
 - Ongoing guidance and check-ins with OREC, OEDIT, and CSU Extension
 - Possibility of implementation funding from OEDIT

Partner community expectations

For the student-community partnership to be successful, the following is expected from participating communities.

- Creation of a steering committee to help lead and implement the planning assistance process
- Appointment of a community point-person from the steering committee for direct student contact throughout the semester
 - Weekly communication (30min – 1hr) between the student team and the community point-person is expected (email/phone/video conferencing)
- Five meetings between the steering committee and the student team (1.5 hours each)
 - Introductory meeting
 - 2 x Workshop planning meetings
 - 2 x Post-workshop meetings
- Completed RERC Assessment tool and stakeholder list
- Community workshop planning and organizational/logistical assistance
- Access to relevant community data, plans and other documentation that can assist student teams
- An open-mind to new and diverse perspectives and ideas
- Be a mentor! Help students gain real-world experience and build their professional skills

The steering committee will also be expected to assist with the following:

- Identification of, and outreach to, key stakeholders that represent the diversity of the community
- Obtaining community buy-in and participation into the planning assistance process and the community workshop
- Planning and organization of community tour and logistics for community workshop

Project costs:

The MENV program recognizes that many partner communities have limited funds for planning assistance. However, there are costs associated with this project that can be categorized as follows:

1. **In-person community workshop costs:** These include the costs of booking a

suitable venue, hosting the community tour, and providing necessary refreshments and materials for participants across the duration of the workshop.

2. **Student travel costs and miscellaneous costs:** Students will be expected to travel to the partner community to host the in-person community workshop and participate in the community tour. Costs include 2-3 night's accommodation, food, mileage (calculated at the state government rate of .59c a mile). Miscellaneous project costs include any costs associated with printing maps and report preparation.

The MENV program has partnered with the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office to reduce the costs for participation for partner communities. While the partner community is expected to cover the in-person community workshop costs, all student travel and miscellaneous costs will be covered by the MENV program and the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office.

State partners:

The [Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry \(OREC\)](#) is a division of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT). OREC supports the development of Colorado's economy by providing a central point of contact, advocacy, and resources at the state level for the diverse constituents, businesses, and communities that rely on the continued health of the outdoor recreation economy in Colorado. OREC is one of 14 divisions that make up OEDIT. OEDIT's role is to create a positive business climate that encourages dynamic economic development and sustainable job growth. OEDIT advances the state's economy through financial and technical programs under the leadership of the Governor and the Executive Director.

Colorado State University's [Office of Engagement and Extension \(CSU OEE\)](#) connects the university with communities, learning and serving together to empower individuals and create meaningful impact. For over 100 years, CSU Extension, part of CSU OEE, has been a trusted partner connecting Coloradans to actionable, research-based solutions and programming on a wide range of topic areas. Today, CSU Extension serves all 64 Colorado counties. In partnership with the State of Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Office and the University of Colorado-Boulder, CSU OEE will support Community Action Plan (CAP) implementation by connecting CAP points of contact and communities with the vast network of CSU Extension staff resources.

Federal partners:

The [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities \(RERC\) Program](#) is a planning assistance program that helps communities identify strategies to grow their

outdoor recreation economy and revitalize their Main Streets. Recreation Economy for Rural Communities is sponsored by the [USDA Forest Service](#), the [Northern Border Regional Commission](#), the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) and EPA.

About the Masters of the Environment (MENV) program:

The [Masters of the Environment](#) program at the University of Boulder, Colorado is an interdisciplinary professional masters program focused on developing sustainability leaders. Through applied education, students are trained to be skilled professionals working in one of 5 specializations: urban resiliency and sustainability, renewable energy, sustainable food systems, sustainability in the outdoor industry, and environmental and natural resource policy. We are developing change-makers who can assist communities, businesses and organizations across all sectors to address complex problems.

About the course instructor:

Dr. Natalie Ooi is a Teaching Associate Professor and the Sustainability in the Outdoor Industry specialization lead for the Masters of the Environment (MENV) program. She is also the lead faculty for the Building Resilient Communities through the ORE graduate certificate in the online Masters of the Outdoor Recreation Economy (ORE) program. She is an educator and researcher who specializes in sustainable tourism and recreation, her passion lies in working with industry and communities to prepare the next generation of leaders to contribute to an innovative, resilient and just tourism/outdoor recreation economy.

Relevant contacts:

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Links to previous community action plans:

If you are interested in viewing previous community action plans developed by students in this course, please click on the following links:

Leadville, CO:

[Leadville Community Action Plan](#)

[Leadville Appendices](#)

Hayden, CO:

[Hayden Community Action Plan](#)

[Hayden Appendices](#)

Cripple Creek, CO:

[Cripple Creek Community Action Plan](#)

[Cripple Creek Appendices](#)