



State of Colorado

Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade

Rio Blanco County
Industry Attraction Initiative
December 2016





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Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) Team

Below lists contact information for the Blueprint 2.0 Industry Attraction Initiative for the Rio Blanco County

Organization	Name	Title	Phone / E-Mail
Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)	Sam Bailey	Senior Manager, Global Business Development	303.892.3725 sam.bailey@state.co.us
Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)	Danielle Lendriet	Regional Coordinator and Analyst	303.884.3711 Danielle.lendriet@state.co.us
Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)	Meridith Marshall	Health and Wellness Champion and Senior Regional Economic Development Manager	303.656.5072 Meridith.marshall@state.co.us

Executive Summary: Blueprint 2.0 Industry Attraction Initiative for Rio Blanco County

Goals for Rio Blanco County

One primary goal of Rio Blanco County's economic development activities is attracting a data center to the Rangely area. Thorough analysis proves that business operating costs for a business of this type are attractive in Rio Blanco County, and with appropriate broadband service, the infrastructure "ground work" has been completed. Community representatives now need to identify the feasibility of actually attracting this industry, determine any services that would need to be developed, and understand next steps to industry attraction.

Success can be measured in a variety of ways, including business counts, economic impact as this would be a new industry, population growth, assessed property values, unemployment rate, workforce participation rate, and commercial vacancy rates in the downtown business district of Rangely.

Rio Blanco County and the communities of Meeker and Rangely have been particularly hard hit with the decline in natural resource extraction activities. While areas of Colorado are rebounding from economic decline, Northwest Colorado is severely lagging. Employment layoffs are occurring frequently, student population in the local school districts is decreasing at a drastic rate, real estate values are dismal, and nearly every small business is on the brink of closure. Displaced workers find it difficult to find a job utilizing their existing employment skill set, and diversifying the economic base and local business mix is a necessity. While some new investment has been occurring in the business community of Meeker, it is primarily with retail business and without a more stable economic base, they will not be able to thrive. For these reasons, economic development is at the forefront of community actions.

Observations

- Rio Blanco County Economic Development has the participation of local community members, businesses, the chamber, and others to develop a coordinated approach to business recruitment, retention, and expansion.
- Rio Blanco County has made substantial progress on their broadband infrastructure with investments in one-gig across the county. The community's technical expertise is a major advantage in securing projects and investment as the county is ready to take on heavy users in Rangely or Meeker.
- Rio Blanco County needs to establish a process to handle primary employer recruitment, which includes:
 - Prospect Intake & Qualification
 - Education on local, county, and state programs adapted to the prospects project
 - Timeline of local, county, and state program approvals/deployment
 - County-wide inventory of assets
 - Case studies of other private-sector companies operating throughout the county for marketing purposes
 - Comprehensive workforce study for Rio Blanco County to determine workforce strengths and weaknesses
- Community is evaluating the opportunity to be designated as a Colorado Rural Jump Start Zone to encourage potential employment and development projects.
- Economic development efforts are led primarily by Katelin Cook with Rio Blanco County's Economic Development department.
- Develop real estate and community data to market with site selectors and industry leaders
 - Utility availability and capacity at sites and buildings available in the community
 - Transportation capacity throughout the county
 - Workforce makeup across the county
 - Existing employers in the community and Region 11
- Rio Blanco County does not have established economic development incentives, resources, or programs ready to market.

Recommendations & Next Steps

- 1) Develop a Rio Blanco County Economic Development Business Recruitment, Retention, and Expansion Process
 - a. Develop a handbook of each process with agreement from stakeholders and local elected officials
 - b. Create a timeline that allows a prospect to see the development of a project from the first conversation to taking their building/site to fully operational status
 - c. Ensure that local and county permitting aligns with the economic development process and strategy developed by Rio Blanco County Economic Development
- 2) Work with county commissioners and local elected officials to develop economic development programs and incentives
 - a. Utilize existing legislation to establish Rio Blanco County Business Personal Property Tax (BPPT) Program, which allows a county to rebate up to 100% of the county's portion of the BPPT for up to 35 years. Most communities are comfortable rebating 50% of the BPPT for up to 10 years.
 - b. Establish Rio Blanco County as a Rural Jump Start community
 - i. Pass resolutions at the county and local level to adopt the Rural Jump Start program
 - ii. Seek approval from the Economic Development Commission to be designated as a Rural Jump Start Community
 - iii. Include Rural Jump Start tax benefits in all economic development marketing materials at the local and county level
 - c. Include all Small Business Administration and United State Department of Agriculture Rural Development programming to support local, county, and state resources.
- 3) Conduct community inventory of available sites and buildings
 - a. Buildings
 - i. Track all available square footage, lease/purchase terms, utility capacities at the location, buyer/broker information, and surrounding assets
 - ii. Upload information to Colorado InSite
 - b. Land
 - i. Track all available acreage, zoning, lease/purchase terms, utility capacities at the location, buyer/broker information, previous uses at the site, and surrounding assets
 - ii. Upload information to Colorado InSite
- 4) Once efforts 1 through 3 have been completed, provide marketing and unsolicited proposals to site selectors specializing in data center or information technology projects

Supporting Documents

- [Blueprint 2.0 Rio Blanco County Industry Attraction PowerPoint](#)
- [Rio Blanco County Workforce Study Completed by OEDIT](#)
- [Example OEDIT Proposal to Recruit IT Company to Colorado](#)
- [Example OEDIT Proposal to Recruit Food Production Company to Colorado](#)



**Colorado Office of Economic Development
and International Trade**
1625 Broadway, Suite 2700 | Denver, CO 80202
303.892.3840 | FAX 303.892.3848
www.advancecolorado.com

