

# THE COLORADO RESILIENCE ENGINE (CORE)

## INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT 2025



Innosphere



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# ABOUT

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In Spring 2025, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability USA (ICLEI USA) launched the Colorado Resilience Engine (CORE) Internship Program with a clear mission: to build the capacity of Colorado local governments and empower them to implement resilience projects, while also training the next generation of resilience professionals.

With support from the NSF ASCEND Engine in Colorado and Wyoming, Innosphere, the National Science Foundation, and the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, CORE placed five graduate interns with Colorado local governments in its inaugural year. Each intern brought experience in environmental science, planning, or public policy. Each host community provided real-world projects focused on climate resilience, disaster preparedness, or natural resource management.

In 2025, CORE interns generated tangible benefits for their host communities. Interns developed community-driven resilience frameworks, extreme heat emergency planning tools, roadmaps for implementing resilience hubs, successful grant proposals, and funding-ready resilience programs supporting equitable investments in local food systems and water conservation.

Being embedded within local governments allowed interns to gain hands-on experience supporting local climate resilience efforts, while also giving them the chance to build skills in community engagement, policy development, grant writing, program implementation, and more. Ultimately, their work translated community input, local priorities, and data into implementable projects that their host communities will carry forward beyond the program year.



# OUR IMPACT

**100%**

of host governments advanced their climate resilience goals

**4 of 5**

communities moved projects from planning into implementation

**20+**

community engagement events reached ~200 residents

CORE interns supported:

**9** plans/studies

**3** policies

**3** grants

**\$100,000+**

in local government investments unlocked to advance interns' initiatives

CORE intern support secured over **\$2 million in grant funding** for one participating local government

**100%**

of interns reported that the program helped them achieve their professional goals

## Advancing Equitable Resilience in Englewood

In the City of Englewood, CORE intern Colton Zadkovic developed a Community Climate Resilience Framework informed by extensive outreach and engagement with residents. Colton presented the framework to City Council, which formally adopted it—giving Englewood a practical roadmap for advancing resilience while also providing Colton a career-defining experience. Englewood hired Colton to stay on after his internship as a City Management Fellow. In that role, he will continue implementing projects he started during his CORE internship.

# RESILIENCE HUB EXPLORATION

## LAFAYETTE, COLORADO

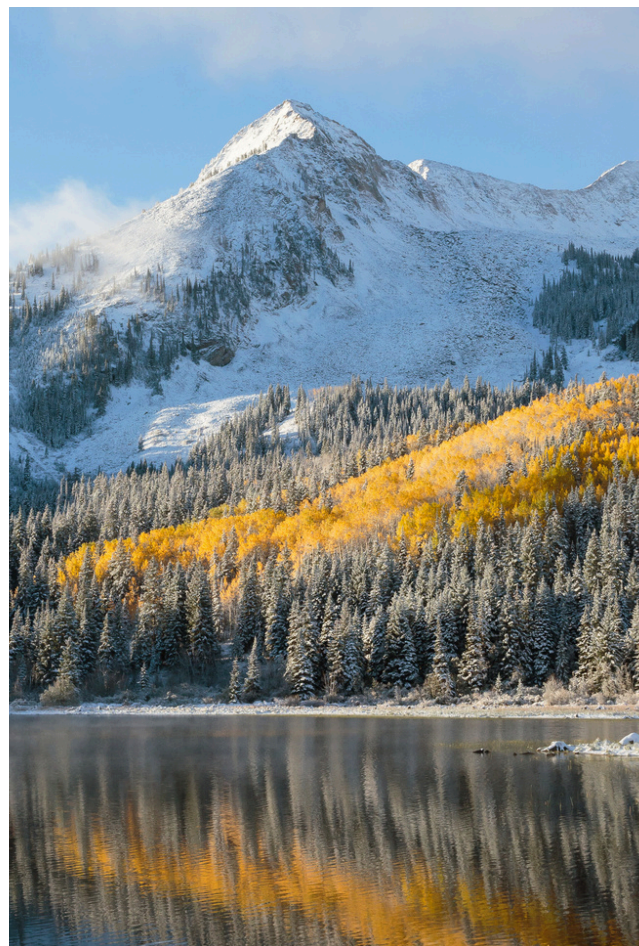
### Resilience Challenge

In the City of Lafayette, reducing the impacts of climate-driven disruptions—such as power outages, extreme heat, and storms—is a key city-wide goal. In the City’s 2024 Climate Action Plan, resilience hubs were identified as a priority action to help residents prepare for extreme heat and other related emergencies. To help the City advance this goal, CORE Intern Brooke Miller conducted a foundational gap analysis and identified next steps for implementing a city-wide network of resilience hubs. A resilience hub is a community-focused facility, like a library or community center, that is enhanced to support residents and offer services and resources before, during, and after climate disasters, emergencies, and other disruptions.



### Summary of the Project

- A **Gap Analysis** was conducted to assess five potential resilience hub sites and identify the resources and services that could be offered to residents at each site.
- **Site Visits** were conducted of active resilience hubs to learn how other Colorado communities have designed and funded them.
- A **Feasibility Questionnaire** helped the project team assess the feasibility of delivering priority services (e.g., refrigeration for medicine, high-capacity air conditioning to provide cooling during heat waves) at different sites, and to understand the need for infrastructure retrofits at existing facilities.
- A **Tiered Approach** was developed to help tailor resilience hub sites to meet needs associated with specific at-risk groups, disadvantaged neighborhoods, and types of disruptions.



## Connecting with Residents and Partners

Resilience hubs are intentionally designed to be community-serving facilities and, as a result, are most successful when they are designed with, for, and by the community. To support this goal, Brooke met with community partners to learn about infrastructure and funding needed to successfully implement hubs at specific sites, and distributed a community survey to collect resident input. Brooke also directly supported two resident focus groups, two tabling events, and 18 meetings with city officials, county emergency services, state and county public health offices, regional transportation offices, the state resiliency office, and other community-based and non-profit partners, such as Together Colorado and Via Colorado.

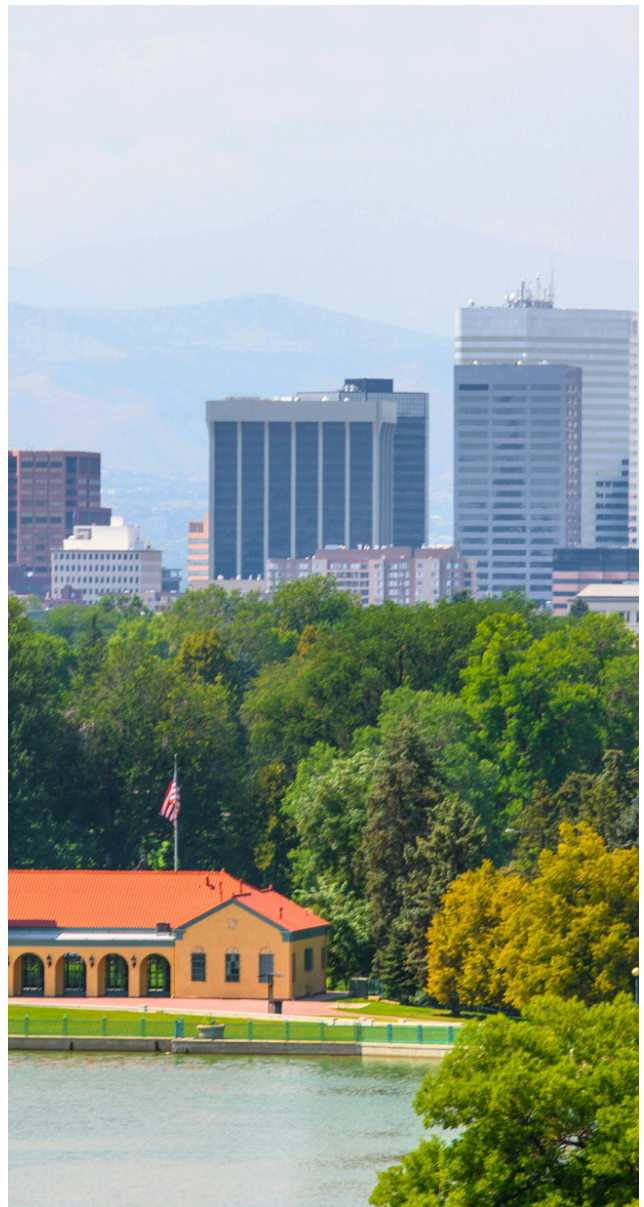
## Outcomes

Once implemented, the city-wide network of resilience hubs will:

- Deliver critical services to Lafayette residents during climate disruptions, such as cooling during heat waves, clean air during wildfires, and charging stations and refrigeration during power outages.
- Provide multi-functional community spaces that support ongoing “sunny-day” programming—such as educational activities, public and mental health resources, and workforce development—that help grow long-term resilience.
- Build social cohesion among residents by creating central gathering places that bring communities together.

## Next Steps

CORE intern support positioned Lafayette to advance its goal of deploying a city-wide network of resilience hubs. The intern’s work forms the backbone of the Lafayette Resilience Hub Roadmap and Resources Guide, which guides the City’s next steps in advancing its resilience hub goals. Lafayette is also exploring a Neighborhood Resilience Program, which would be designed to raise awareness of the resilience hub network, lay the foundation for ongoing investment, and foster connections between residents to build neighborhood resilience.



# BUILDING COMMUNITY CLIMATE RESILIENCE

## GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

### Resilience Challenge

The City of Grand Junction faces growing risk from extreme heat, drought, and wildfire, which are already impacting residents and straining emergency services and city operations. To support resilience planning, the City needed locally grounded data and tools to better understand risks, protect vulnerable populations, and coordinate responses across departments. To advance this goal, CORE Intern Eloise Armour delivered a Community Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) and Heat Report, and a Heat Tabletop Exercise to strengthen Grand Junction’s resilience planning and response capacity.



### Summary of the Project

- ICLEI USA’s vulnerability assessment framework was used to develop a [Community Risk and Vulnerability Assessment](#) that identified locally relevant hazards, vulnerable populations, and practical near-term actions for city departments.
- An [EMS and Heat Report](#) used an analysis of 911 calls to assess how extreme heat and community demographics drive demand for emergency services and increase operational and fiscal strain.
- A [Heat Tabletop Exercise](#) was designed to support interdepartmental heat response planning.

“Learning how local government can have an impact on large-scale sustainability and resilience for a whole community was really eye-opening! I was really grateful to be able to learn more about how local governments operate and implement different projects. Additionally, being involved in a cohort with other grad students was a wonderful opportunity and very inspiring,”

*Eloise Armour, 2025 CORE Intern, City of Grand Junction.*



## Local Data, Local Priorities

Community-informed local datasets made up the backbone of this project. Sources included the City's 2023 NOAA National Integrated Heat Health Information System (NIHHIS) Urban Heat Island mapping campaign, Sustainability and Adaptation Plan, Unhoused Report, 911 call data, and other local planning documents that reflect community conditions and concerns. Eloïse also participated in a tabling event to hear directly from residents about their heat resilience priorities.

## Outcomes

Together, the Vulnerability Assessment, EMS and Heat Report, and Heat Tabletop Exercise give Grand Junction a clearer picture of its climate risks, how they affect residents and city services, and information to inform actionable next steps. Going forward, this work helps Grand Junction:

- Identify concentrations of hazard risk and disproportionately affected populations.
- Anticipate heat-season operational strain and plan staffing and resources accordingly.
- Recognize rising fiscal exposure from increased emergency response demand.
- Strengthen cross-departmental collaboration across teams working on emergency management, planning, and public health.

## Next Steps

Grand Junction plans to use the Vulnerability Assessment to guide near-term resilience actions across city departments. The emergency management team intends to run the Heat Tabletop Exercise to further refine response protocols. The Heat and EMS Report will be shared with the Housing Division and county partners. All materials were designed to be plug-and-play, supporting the City's continued progress on resilience moving forward.



# COMMUNITY CLIMATE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

## ENGLEWOOD, COLORADO

### Resilience Challenge

The City of Englewood faces a range of climate-related challenges—including extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and constrained water resources—that require coordinated action. To translate resident priorities into implementable strategies, CORE Intern Colton Zadkovic led the development of a Community Climate Resilience Framework. The framework highlights existing City plans, projects, and assets that already promote climate resilience and outlines new resilience-building strategies that align with Englewood’s strategic plan.

### Summary of the Project

- The team conducted two **Community Resilience Workshops** and ran a Survey where residents articulated their vision of resilience and identified priority climate vulnerabilities and solutions.
- A **Feasibility Assessment** evaluated implementation of resident- and department-proposed resilience solutions and identified partners to support future work.
- A **Best-Practice Review** of peer city case studies helped the project team ensure the final framework would be grounded in proven, scalable strategies.
- The draft **Community Climate Resilience Framework** drew on findings from community engagement, the feasibility assessment, and the best practice review.
- An **Ecological Alignment Tracker** was created to integrate ecosystem protection into Englewood’s \$41.5 million parks bond projects.



## Wide-Ranging Community Engagement

Since this project needed to be directly shaped by Englewood residents, community engagement was essential at every stage. Colton helped host seven resident outreach events and workshops, including Englewood's Earth Day celebration, a mobile home outreach event, and several "Englewood Neighborhood Nights." At each of these, Colton gathered resident input and feedback on the framework. Later, to close the loop, Englewood shared a draft of the framework with workshop participants, along with a survey to collect additional thoughts and suggestions.

## Outcomes

The Community Climate Resilience Framework provides Englewood with a resident-informed roadmap for strengthening resilience across social, environmental, and operational dimensions. The framework:

- Elevates community-building and social connection as core components of climate resilience.
- Identifies strategies to improve hazard preparedness for residents, such as evacuation training, resilience hubs, and climate resilience toolkits tailored to homeowners and renters.
- Advances operational resilience by expanding heat safety training for Englewood staff and prioritizing the development of poor air quality (e.g., wildfire smoke, ozone days) safety protocols.
- Embeds ecosystem protection into capital investments through the Ecological Alignment Tracker.

## Next Steps

With Englewood's current strategic plan concluding this year, the City will explore integrating the Community Climate Resilience Framework into its 2026–2030 strategic plan and relevant departmental work plans. A process will be established to monitor outcomes and gather resident input on whether the initiatives are strengthening community climate resilience.



# PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR WILDFIRE, WATER, AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS GOALS

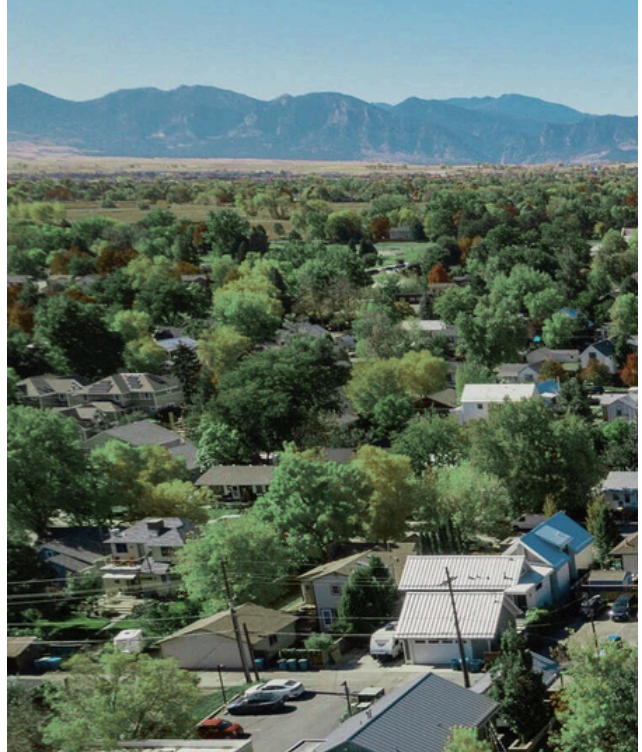
## LOUISVILLE, COLORADO

### Resilience Challenge

In the City of Louisville, strengthening community preparedness for climate-driven hazards such as extreme heat, wildfires, and drought is a top priority. To help the City make meaningful progress on realizing these goals, CORE Intern Erin Spencer bolstered the City's disaster risk communication programming, planned a wildfire mitigation rebate system, and developed water conservation programming. Once implemented, these efforts will reduce climate risk, conserve natural resources, and build long-term resilience for the Louisville community.

### Summary of the Project

- A model for a [Wildfire Mitigation Rebate](#) program was developed; the new model incorporates equity considerations and GIS data into a tiered rebate structure that prioritizes the most vulnerable residents.
- The City's [Disaster Preparedness Month](#) programming was strengthened with a redesigned outreach strategy that introduced weekly themes, social media campaigns, prize-based incentives, and public-facing events.
- ICLEI USA's Climate and Sustainability Communications Toolkit directly informed [Communications Improvements](#), including an audit and reorganization of content on the City's sustainability webpages to create a more accessible, resident-friendly hub for climate information.
- [Program Concept Materials](#), including Excel matrices on scalable best practices and implementation scenarios, were created for a residential rain barrel rebate and a non-residential turf conversion program targeting businesses, HOAs, and large property owners.



## Climate Communications Wins

Community engagement was a central component of Erin's project, particularly during Disaster Preparedness Month. To effectively engage diverse groups within Louisville, Erin created interactive social media content, coordinated 10 community events serving staff and the public, and supported direct outreach to residents to increase awareness of disaster preparedness resources. Overall, Disaster Preparedness Month programming reached over 1,000 residents.

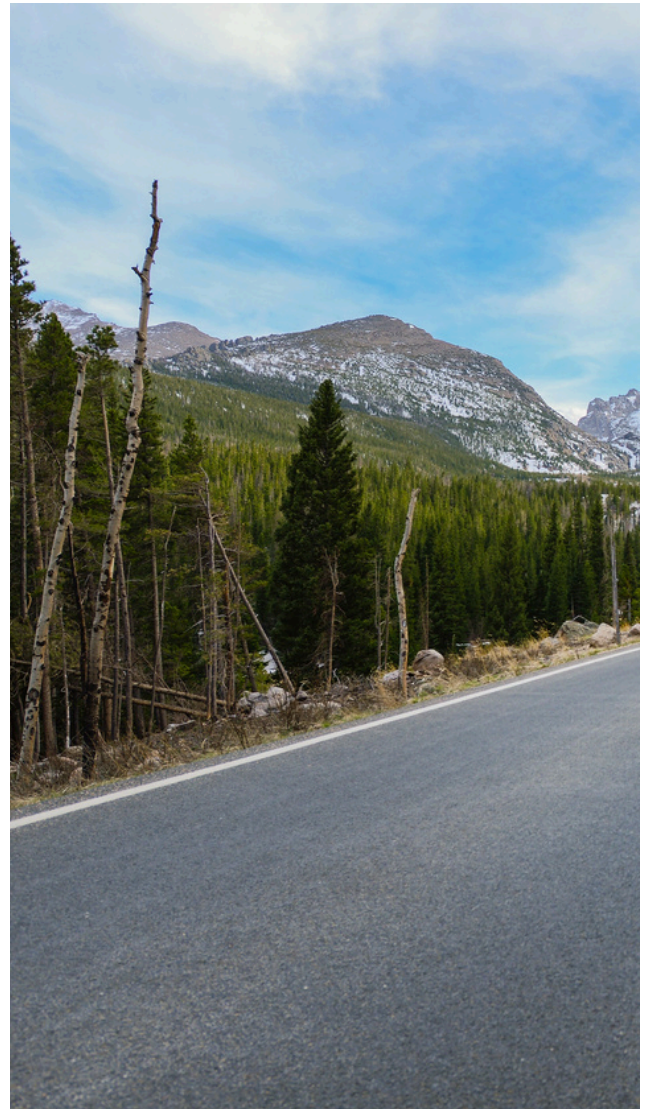
## Outcomes

Together, these efforts strengthened Louisville's capacity to prepare for climate hazards and manage natural resources effectively, with ongoing benefits including:

- Increased resident awareness of preparedness strategies for extreme heat, wildfires, and power outages.
- The stronger, more equitable Wildfire Mitigation Rebate program design is ready for funding; once implemented, it will position the city to reduce wildfire risk, particularly for vulnerable residents.
- Implementation-ready water conservation program concepts will lead to cost savings, improve stormwater management and landscape health, and increase drought resilience by promoting behavioral shifts in water use.

## Next Steps

Moving forward, the City will continue refining water conservation program designs through consultations with organizations such as Resource Central and the Keep It Clean Partnership. The Sustainability Division, Sustainability Advisory Board, public works, and Louisville leadership will continue exploring implementation and funding opportunities to build out wildfire and drought resilience programming.



# PATHWAYS TO RESILIENT AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEMS, AND BUILDINGS

## TELLURIDE, COLORADO

### Resilience Challenge

The Town of Telluride’s 2022 Climate Action Plan identifies the need to strengthen the resilience of its buildings, natural systems, and food systems. To move from planning to implementation, CORE Intern Dannel Tigreros worked with the Town to pilot a community-centered local food program and to lay the groundwork for a benchmarking and building performance standards policy that improves energy resilience. Together, these initiatives prepare Telluride to develop a community resilience hub program, including organizational protocols and buildings that provide essential resources to residents both day-to-day and during emergencies. Ultimately, the resilience hub program would advance equitable access to fresh, local food and provide energy-resilient spaces for residents to receive support and shelter during climate disruptions.

### Summary of the Project

- Developed a blueprint for a 14-week **Community-Supported Agriculture Pilot Program** that will connect residents with local produce while supporting regional farmers.
- Created English- and Spanish-language versions of a **Survey** to seek resident input and gauge program scope.
- Developed an **Implementation Plan** by establishing partnerships with a local volunteer food organization, engaging local farmers, and exploring circular systems with waste haulers and composters.
- Drafted a **Benchmarking and Building Performance Standards Roadmap** based on research into similar policies across Colorado, outreach to peer communities, and national best practices.
- Supported **Grant Writing** for a successful Colorado Energy Office IMPACT Accelerator grant proposal that led to a \$2.196 million award.



*“Our CORE Intern truly multiplied the reach of my normally one-person Sustainability Office with outreach and stakeholder engagement work,”*

*Darin Graber, Sustainability and Grant Administrator, Town of Telluride*

## Bringing Residents and Partners to the Table

Community engagement for the Community-Supported Agriculture pilot was initiated through collaboration with a member of the Town's Ecology Commission. Danniell developed a bilingual (English and Spanish) survey, which was distributed through nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups, ensuring accessibility and comfort for respondents. Danniell also laid the groundwork for community engagement for the Roadmap by outlining plans to convene a task force of building owners, tenants, industry professionals, and town representatives.

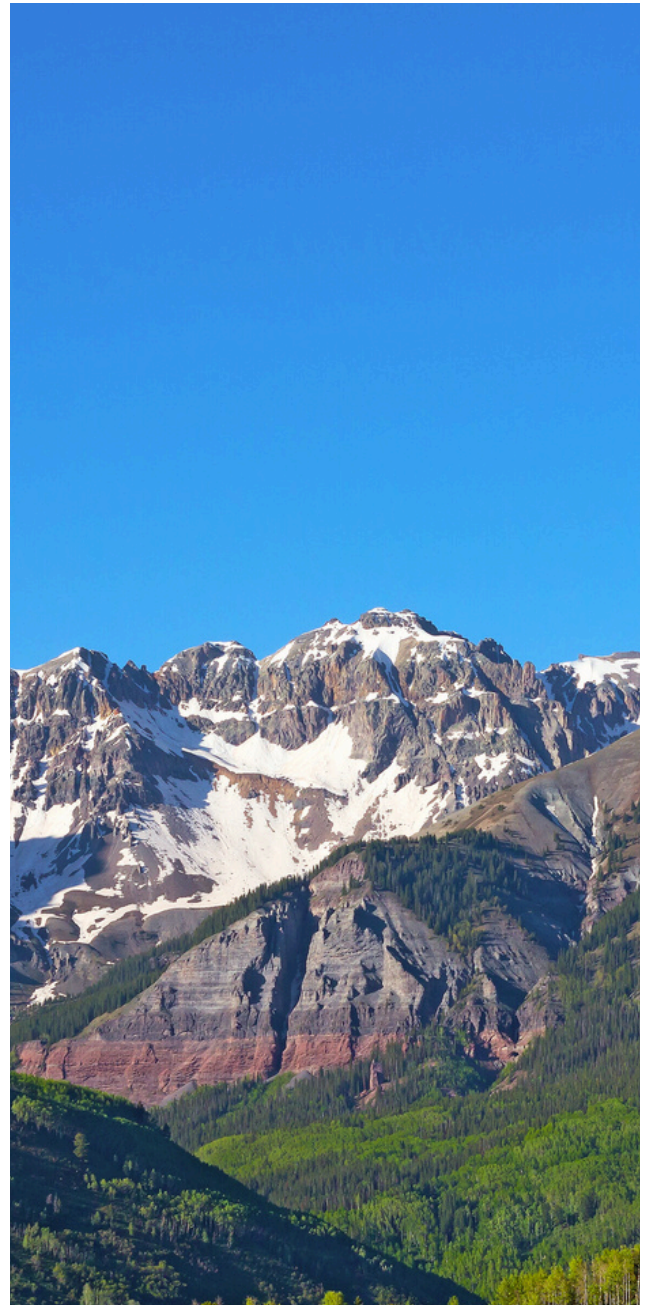
## Outcomes

These initiatives advance Telluride's resilience priorities by strengthening local food systems, laying the groundwork for resilience hubs, and preparing the town to improve building performance and energy reliability. Outcomes include:

- Telluride was awarded over 2 million dollars through the IMPACT Accelerator grant program, which will directly fund implementation of the Benchmarking and Building Performance Standards Roadmap.
- Following adoption, the Roadmap will improve energy efficiency and reliability, as well as drive resilience upgrades such as alternative lighting, window films, and reflective roofing to reduce cooling demand during extreme heat.
- Increased readiness to launch a subsidized Community-Supported Agriculture pilot that will expand access to local produce and support agricultural livelihoods.
- Developed partnerships that support resilient, circular food systems linking produce distribution, food waste, and composting.

## Next Steps

Telluride is pursuing grant funding for the Community-Supported Agriculture pilot. In the meantime, the Town is continuing to have conversations with farmers to assess their capacity and interest, and will seek to build partnerships with community organizations to support pickup locations and program delivery. With the Roadmap having received funding, the Town's next step is to convene a community task force to guide policy development and implementation.



# LESSONS LEARNED

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In 2025, the CORE program demonstrated the power of pairing emerging professionals with local governments to deliver meaningful, on-the-ground climate resilience outcomes. Across Colorado, interns served as true capacity multipliers, enabling communities to advance work that would not have been possible with existing staff time and resources. Their contributions strengthened local readiness for climate impacts while producing tangible tools, plans, and programs that communities can continue to build upon.

At the same time, CORE strengthened Colorado's climate workforce pipeline. Interns gained real-world experience working inside local governments, taking on visible leadership roles and building practical skills in community engagement, policy development, data analysis, grant writing, and program implementation. By presenting to city councils, advisory boards, regional audiences, and residents, interns emerged from the program with a better understanding of local roles and responsibilities in preparing communities for climate impacts, and will be equipped for leadership roles in their future careers.



Interns also learned to navigate and overcome some of the challenges of working on resilience at the local level, including:

- The need to build trust between local governments and residents
- The importance of private sector partners in advancing and advocating for resilience initiatives
- The value of engagement processes that reach the most underserved communities and ensure language accessibility
- The importance of framing resilience work to align with city priorities and city council voting processes
- Strategies for sustaining support for climate work in the face of shifts in political leadership and local priorities
- How to craft compelling grant proposals that make the case for community pilots that inform broader scaling of resilience initiatives
- The need to craft policies and programs that balance resident ambition with constrained local budgets and staff capacity
- The value of focusing on high-priority resilience actions while continuing to monitor the full range of climate risks facing communities across sectors and government functions

So far, the 2025 CORE program pilot has proven that the CORE model works to deliver immediate benefits for host communities, while also positioning them for long-term progress on climate resilience. Multiple local governments have so far emphasized their desire to extend their interns' service (pending funding), a strong indicator of program relevance, impact, and potential for replication across Colorado and beyond.

# LOOKING AHEAD: NEXT STEPS

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Contingent on funding, ICLEI USA hopes to run CORE for the next three years, each year accepting at least five new Colorado graduate students and municipalities into the program. The team is actively pursuing new funding and programmatic partners to maintain, grow, and expand CORE both within and beyond the state of Colorado.

