

Community partner brief: Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP)

RTAP Overview:

The Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) partners teams of graduate students from the Masters of the Environment (MENV) program at CU Boulder 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 rural communities in Colorado. Graduate students take on the role as community consultants and walk their partner communities through a facilitated planning assistance process that is based upon the RERC program, to develop a Community Action Plan for the next 12-24 months. CSU Extension then provides support for the subsequent 2 year period to assist partner communities with the implementation of the Community Action Plan.

RTAP purpose and goals:

The purpose of this program is 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 program also provides graduate students with the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to provide partner communities assistance with:

- Comprehensively assessing of 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 of relevant case study examples on how 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

RTAP process:

The RTAP program is made up of three phases. Phase 1 is the introductory and preparation phase; Phase 2 is centered around community engagement and action planning, and Phase 3 focuses on implementation of the Community Action Plan.

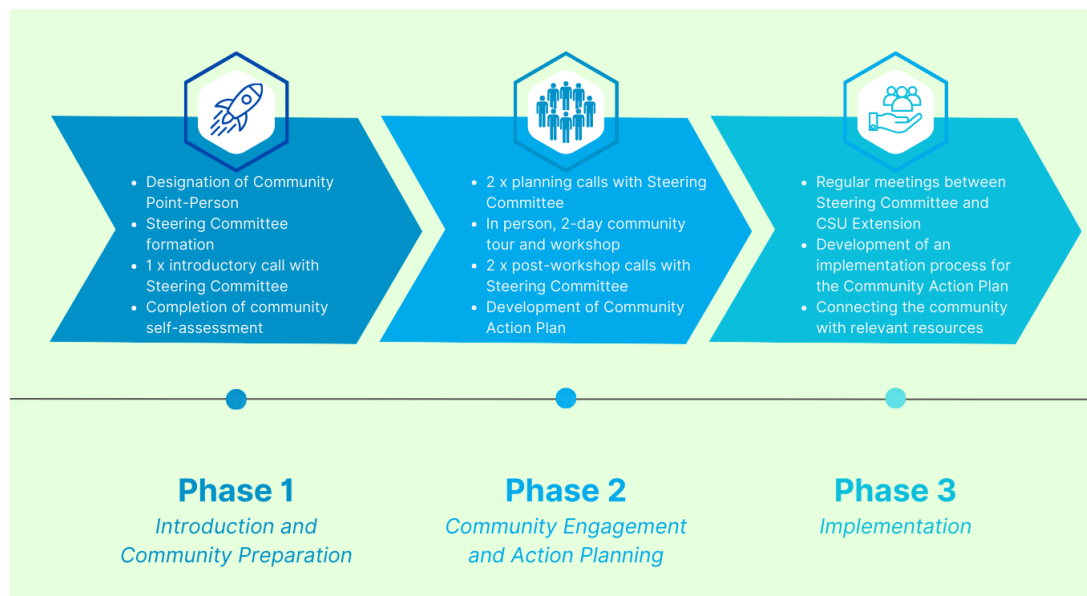


Figure 1. Phases of the RTAP process

Phase 1 Introduction and community preparation: (Oct 2024 – Jan 12th 2025)

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

- An introductory meeting between the facilitation team and community point-of contact
- Community steering committee formation (led by the community point-of-contact)
- An introductory planning call with the steering committee, facilitation team, and state partners
- Completion of a community self-assessment (by the steering committee)

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

- Creation of a steering committee that is representative of the local community
- Identification of the dates and location for the in-person community tour and workshop that will be held in the spring
- Completion of the community self-assessment

Phase 2 Community engagement and action planning: (Jan 13th 2025 – May 9th 2025)

Phase 2 is led by graduate student teams and supported by Natalie Ooi, Matt Nunez,

Guinevere Nelson, and other state and federal partners. It consists of:

- **January 13th - Mid-March:**
 - 2 x planning calls (1.5hrs each) with steering committee and student team to:
 - Identify community goals
 - Prepare and plan for the community tour and workshop
 - Promote the workshop among community members
- **Mid-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
- **Mid-March - May 2nd**
 - 2 x post-workshop planning calls with steering committee and student team to:
 - Draft and further develop action items created during the community workshop
 - Mobilize resources and community support for these action items
 - Review drafts of the Community Action Plan
- **May 9th:**
 - Final Community Action Plan is delivered to the community
 - Graduate student team present the final Community Action Plan to the steering committee and broader community

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

Phase 3. Implementation

Phase 3 is led by Guinevere Nelson, CSU Extension, and supported by Matt Nunez and the OREC office. It consists of two years of support from CSU Extension to help develop a process that prioritizes action items, mobilize resources, and brings community members together to implement the action items outlined within the Community Action Plan. This support will look different for each community, based on the action items developed in the Community Action Plan, as well as the existing capacity, experience and knowledge, and established relationships and partnerships within the community.

Across the two years, CSU Extension will:

- Collaboratively develop a process for action item implementation with the community point-of-contact
- Organize and lead regular meetings with the community point-of-contact to check in on progress made towards implementing action items from the Community Action Plan
- Do outreach to the community leads assigned to different action items and provide assistance where relevant and possible
- Connect the community with relevant experts and resources to assist the community implement action items

By the end of Phase 3, the community will have:

- Received guidance and support from CSU Extension to assist with the implementation of the Community Action Plan
- Completed, or be in the process of completing, specific action items detailed in the Community Action Plan

Benefits of participating in the RTAP:

The RTAP helps to galvanize energy and momentum around outdoor recreation and Main Street development, and develop a vision and plan for a community/region. Many communities have numerous plans and reports that address such areas as community and economic development, outdoor recreation infrastructure and development, destination stewardships, and conservation management. Rarely, are there comprehensive and catalytic efforts to bring all of these together, using outdoor recreation as a lens through which community and economic development can occur.

The following benefits and deliverables can be obtained through completion of the RTAP:

- 1. Facilitated two-day community 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
- 2. Final presentation and Community Action Plan 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
- 3. 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
- 4. Rural Colorado community network**
 - Join and connect with a network of rural Colorado communities that have undertaken the RTAP and/or RERC planning processes
 - Learn and share best practices, achievements, and challenges faced with peer communities

RTAP Community roles and responsibilities

Community point-of-contact (POC)

The community point-of-contact (POC) plays an important role as the direct point of communication for the RTAP. The POC is a community leader who can rally community members to engage in the RTAP process. While the graduate student team is responsible for leading the Phase 2 Community Engagement and action planning process, the POC plays a vital role in assisting the graduate student team and liaising between them and the community.

For the RTAP to be successful, the following is expected from the community point-of-contact:

- **Phase 1:**
 - Monthly meetings (1 hr) with the facilitation team to initiate the RTAP process
 - Identification and creation of a steering committee to help lead and implement the planning assistance process
 - Leadership in the completion of the community self-assessment and stakeholder list
 - Provide access to relevant community data, plans and other documentation that can assist the RTAP process
 - Workshop planning and logistics
- **Phase 2:**
 - Weekly communication (30min – 1hr) between the student team and the community point-person (email/phone/video conferencing)
 - Leadership in the planning of the community tour
 - Leadership in the promotion and logistics of the community workshop
 - Publishing of the finalized Community Action Plan so that it is available to the general public
 - Presentation at the community workshop on past, current and future outdoor recreation and Main Street development efforts
 - Leadership on any ‘hot button’ issues that may exist within the community related to outdoor recreation and Main Street development
 - All else outlined below under steering committee expectations
- **Phase 3:**
 - Regular meetings (e.g. monthly or bi-monthly) with Guinevere Nelson and the CSU Extension team to plan and execute on the action items detailed in the Community Action Plan

Local steering committee

The local steering committee is made up of approximately 8-12 community members who represent the diverse interests of the community as it relates to outdoor recreation and Main Street development. This may include local elected officials, business owners, conservation and outdoor recreation non-profits, as well as passionate and engaged community members. For the RTAP to be successful, the following is

expected from the community steering committee.

- **Phase 1:**

- Introductory steering committee meeting (1.5 hours)
- Assistance in identifying and recruiting additional steering committee members
- Meeting(s) with the steering committee to complete the Community Self-Assessment (typically no more than 1-2)

- **Phase 2:**

- Four-five meetings across Feb - May 2025 between the steering committee and the graduate student facilitation team (1.5 hours each)
 - 2 x Workshop planning meetings
 - 2-3 x Post-workshop meetings
- Community workshop planning and organizational/logistical assistance
- Identification of, and outreach to, key stakeholders that represent the diversity of the community
- Promoting the community workshop
- Planning and organization of community tour and logistics for community workshop
- Attendance and participation in the community tour and workshop
- Virtual attendance of the final presentation of the Community Action Plan
- An open-mind to new and diverse perspectives and ideas
- Be a mentor! Help students gain real-world experience and build their professional skills

- **Phase 3:**

- Leadership on the implementation of specific action items
- Ad hoc communication with the CSU Extension team, as necessary

RTAP Timeline

The following table outlines the approximate timeline over which the RTAP process plays out:

Phase	Date(s)	Action
1	Oct 2024 - Jan 12th, 2025	Phase 1 Introduction and community preparation
1	Start of Oct, 2024	Confirmation of community point-of-contact
1	Mid Oct - Mid Nov, 2024	Creation of the steering committee
1	Mid Nov - early Dec, 2024	1 x Introductory steering committee call (1.5 hours)
1	By Jan 12th, 2025	Completion of the community self-assessment
2	Jan 13th - May 9th, 2025	Phase 2 Community engagement and action planning
2	Jan 13 - May 9th, 2025	Weekly check-ins between community point-of-contact and graduate student facilitation team
2	Feb 3rd-7th, 2025	Planning call #1
2	Feb 24th-28th, 2025	Planning call #2
2	March 10th-23rd, 2025	Two-day community workshop and community tour is held
2	April 7th-11th, 2025	Post-workshop call #1
2	April 21st - 25th, 2025	Post-workshop call # 2
2	April 29th or May 1st, 2025	Virtual presentation of Community Action Plan
2	May 9th, 2025	Community Action Plan completed
3	May 2025 - May 2027	Phase 3 implementation
3	Monthly-bi-monthly across 2025-2027	Check-in meetings between community point-of-contact and CSU Extension team
3	Ad hoc	Outreach and check in between CSU Extension and action item leads

RTAP Program costs:

The RTAP 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 and tour 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 facilitation and travel 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 3 nights accommodation, food and mileage (calculated at the state government rate of .59c a mile).
3. **Miscellaneous costs:** Miscellaneous project costs include any costs associated with printing maps and report preparation.

Partner communities are only required to cover the cost of the in-person community workshop and tour.

All student facilitation and travel costs, and miscellaneous costs, will be covered by the Rural Opportunity Office, the MENV program and CU Boulder's Office of Public and Community Engaged Scholarship (PACES).

RTAP Partners

The Rural Technical Assistance Program would not be possible without the following partners.

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.

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.

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.

Relevant contacts:

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Guinevere Nelson, CSU Extension: Guinevere.Nelson@colostate.edu

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:

Spring 2023:

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](#)

Spring 2024:

Lake City, CO:

[Lake City Community Action Plan](#)

[Lake City Appendices](#)

Rangely and Dinosaur, CO:

[Rangely and Dinosaur Community Action Plan](#)

[Rangely and Dinosaur Appendices](#)

Huerfano County, CO:

[Huerfano County Community Action Plan](#)

[Huerfano County Appendices](#)