

# THE COLORADO CHALLENGE PROGRAM: IN REVIEW

June 2021



**DOWNTOWN COLORADO**  
inc.



**COLORADO CHALLENGE PROGRAM**

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## A MESSAGE FROM DOWNTOWN COLORADO, INC.

Since its creation in 2017, the Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program has worked with a diverse mix of 34 Colorado communities to consider solutions around housing, small business support, tourism development, local engagement, brownfield clean-up, financing, and more. We are excited to continue to work with the creative problem-solving power of Colorado's network dedicated to helping these communities.

We have worked throughout the past 5 years to continue to expand the benefits, partnerships, and resources for all of our Challenge Communities. We hope that through our work and this report we can expand on existing partnerships as well as form new ones with statewide universities, service providers, and other regions throughout the state.

Please don't hesitate to reach out!

-Katherine Correll, Executive Director

## Program History

- 2021 Challenge Accelerator Program In Review
- 2020 Challenge Studio Goes Virtual
- 2019 Challenge Studio in CO Springs
- 2018 Challenge Studio in Boulder, CO
- April 2017 First Challenge Studio
- 2017 First Challenge Communities

# Program Past: A Look Back

Since its inception in 2017, DCI has worked with **over 30 Colorado communities** to turn their challenges into opportunities.

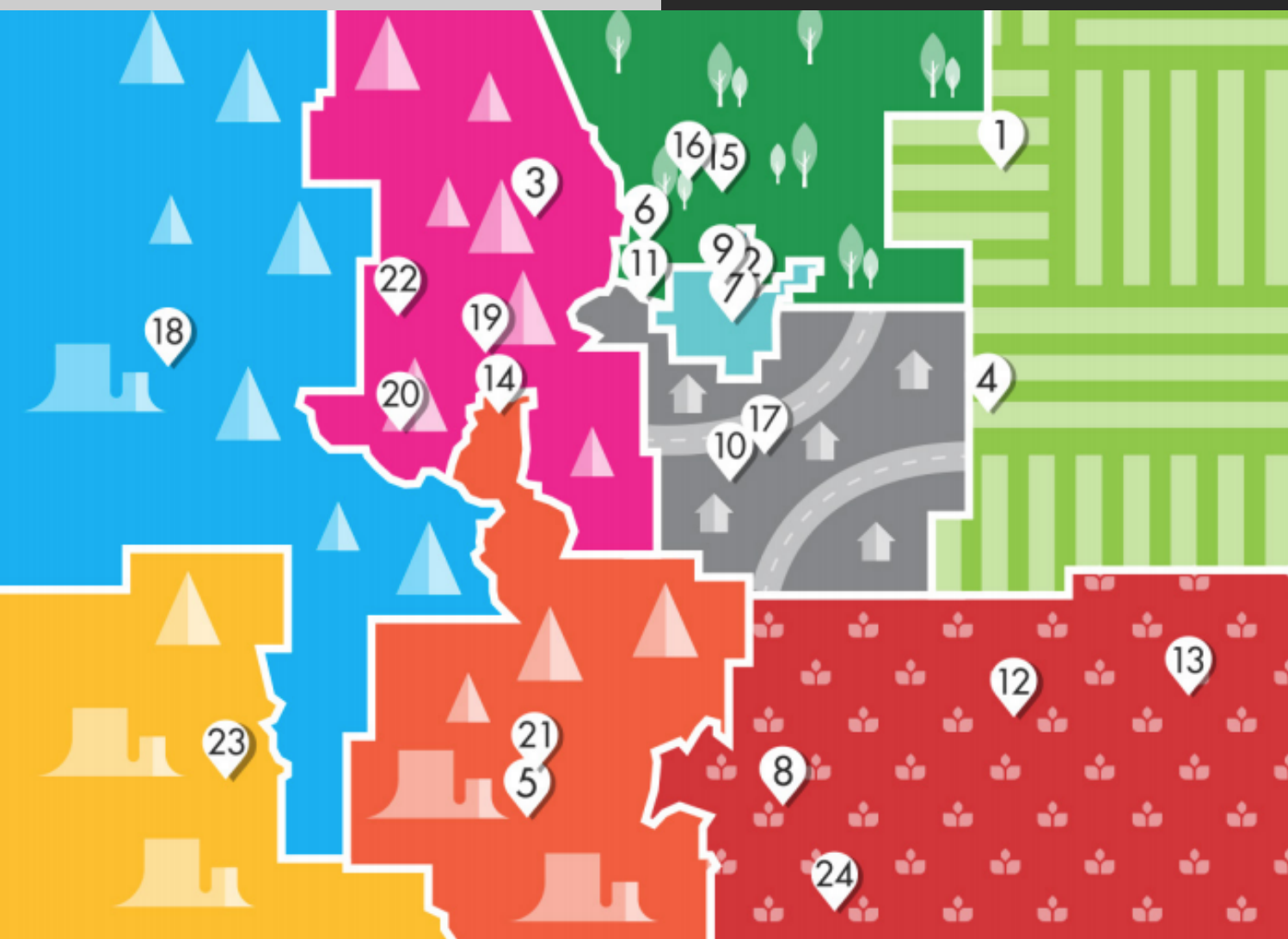
DCI's Colorado Challenge Program is a team-building accelerator focused on establishing a plan of work that engages public, private, and non-profit partners to address a significant community challenge over the course of twelve months.

The Colorado Challenge Program works to establish a proposal, financing approach, and a team of community partners ready to implement their plan of action.

**34**  
Colorado Communities

Over **150k**  
Funding/Grants leveraged

**4**  
Years of the Challenge Community Program



**9**  
Regions of Colorado



## TOWN OF CENTER

### Becoming Business Friendly (2019)

The Town of Center has continued to flourish following a temporary placemaking installation to engage community members around attracting investment. The Town has seen impressive impacts including change of ownership and investment in six long-standing vacant buildings, two commercial and two residential units currently under renovation, approval of funding for beautification, a partnership to bring an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Hub to the Town of Center, funding for a Downtown Capacity Building AmeriCorps VISTA, and connecting with property owners who will donate a property for youth-run coworking.



## CITY OF DURANGO

### Creatively Financing Development (2020)

As the pandemic emerged, DCI and the City of Durango were able to quickly adapt to develop a strategic approach to ensure the economic viability of re-opening their economy responsibly. Once the recovery effort was well underway, the City of Durango was able to approve the formation of their Urban Renewal Authority in May 2020. Durango has taken great strides to support place-sensitive, creative redevelopment to address pressing community needs such as attainable and affordable housing. DCI and Durango are now further exploring next steps for a strategic approach to affordable housing.



## TOWN OF EAGLE

### Activating Downtown (2018)

Following the momentum and engagement from the Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program, the downtown assessment, and community plans, the Town of Eagle approved the formation of their downtown development authority in November 2020. The Downtown Business Alliance, a 501c3 formed in May of 2020, played an important role in efforts to form the DDA along with the communications and messaging to create buy-in for the DDA. DCI and the Eagle DDA are now taking steps for TIF capturing, debt authorization, DDA Board duties, and downtown interest.

# COVID-19: The Great Pause of 2020



## DCI + THE PANDEMIC



### VIRTUAL CHALLENGE STUDIO

Following the touchdown of the pandemic, DCI transitioned our Challenge Accelerator Program to a virtual format - to great success! DCI and our CU-Denver SPA Student Coordinators digitally facilitated conversations between key stakeholders to build their teams for two months leading up to the Virtual Challenge Studios. During the Studios, DCI and the Challenge Teams created action plans to help five Colorado communities move forward with tangible next steps toward solutions.



### DOWNTOWN CO SUMMIT

DCI revised our Colorado Challenge Community Summit to be a virtual event geared toward developing multi-faceted approaches for our national, state-wide, and local responses to this type of pandemic. During this April event, we looked at our demographics and sales tax trends, impacts of Coronavirus on Colorado communities and beyond, and fleshed out an action plan for housing, workforce, and small business support.



### CHALLENGE COMMUNITY FORUM

In November 2020, DCI forged ahead with an interactive dialogue to ensure that we are taking our services in the direction Challenge Communities want. We showcased the accomplishments of past and present Challenge Communities, and attendees from all sectors were able to build relationships with Challenge Communities, share their ideas for the program as a whole, and learn how other communities overcame challenges similar to theirs!

- ▲ November 2020  
Challenge Community Forum
- ▲ April 2020  
DCI Challenge Community Summit
- ▲ April 2020  
Virtual Challenge Studio
- ▲ March 2020  
Shutdowns Begin
- ▲ January 2020  
Challenge Communities Begin Work



Community Selection



Team Building



Challenge Studio



Financing Approach



Program Continuation

# Where are we today?

DCI is working to turn the challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic into opportunities. We have learned new ways of interacting and facilitating team-building virtually. We also have a strong partnership with CU Denver's Economic Development class and the School of Public Affairs.

**Our strong network of over 30 previous Challenge Communities continues to support each other and share information and innovative strategies.** Many came out of the virtual DCI Summit and Community Challenge Forum with new strategies and excitement to tackle the challenges ahead!

Some Challenge Communities have continued momentum through the 2020 Pandemic and have emerged regional leaders in local economic recovery. For example, the Town of Center has spearheaded placemaking and community development in the San Luis Valley and serves as a model community for the Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM

### STRENGTHS

- Passionate and engaged network of DCI members, partners, communities, and participants
- Cross-sector, multi-disciplinary approach
- Diversity of Challenge Studio attendees leads to creative solutions
- Colorado Challenge communities can leverage a table full of experts and networks of people ready to help

### WEAKNESSES

- Program schedule limits preparation time for Challenge Studio
- Some Challenge Communities lack time, resources, or political will to adequately address challenges
- CU-Denver Student Coordinator support of Challenge Communities typically spans just the length of their semester-long class

### OPPORTUNITIES

- DCI can expand student participation to other CU Denver classes or other universities
- SPA can add a fall semester class to complement spring class and offer time for preparation or implementation
- Widespread increase in comfort with virtual programming expands potential for Challenge Community team-building

### THREATS

- SPA Economic Development class struggles to maintain high student enrollment
- Lack of consistent funding for the program itself



# GROWING THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM



## Program Future: What's Next?

2017  
April 2017

DCI's work over the next couple years will focus on expanding Phase 5 of the program - Program Continuation. We will work with Challenge Communities beyond the Challenge Studio to source financing, implement their plans, and make their visions a reality.

We also hope to strengthen our partnership with CU Denver's School of Public Affairs as well as explore new and innovative ways to engage students and professionals across sectors and areas of expertise.

2017  
Following the COVID-19 pandemic, DCI looks forward to helping Colorado downtowns use creative and innovative approaches to foster community resiliency and long-term economic development.

### CONTINUE

Continue Program Expansion with Challenge Communities

### BUILD

Build Ideas and Network to Fund Community Initiatives

### CATALYZE

Support Challenge Communities in Catalyzing Investment



### EXPAND

Promotion to Communities, Other Universities, + Media

APPLY TO  
BE A  
COLORADO  
CHALLENGE  
COMMUNITY

ENGAGE  
WITH  
COLORADO  
DOWNTOWNS



# Thank you!

The Colorado Challenge Program creates a dynamic approach capable of adapting to specific community needs. It has evolved each year as we add new resources, partners, and communities. The pandemic has showcased how this program, when paired with amazing community partners, is able to address unexpected challenges.

The program is so dynamic because of the diverse private sector partners and communities that participate. Colorado's Challenge Communities have continually demonstrated innovation and commitment to their businesses and residents.

DCI continually engages and enhances services for all of our Challenge Communities and School of Public Affairs students including past, present, and future. Thank you!

TO LEARN MORE

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