

Local Economic Development & Growth – Presented by Josabeth (Jo) Way, VP

Community Needs as Catalysts for Economic Development

A key principle of successful rural development is starting with real community needs. Addressing essential services not only improves quality of life but also creates opportunities for local businesses, tourism, and civic engagement. The following is a thought to show there are needs that could turn into a business idea that solves a problem.

Example: Fort Garland Drinking Water Station

- Current Challenge: Residents must travel to Alamosa to fill 3–6 gallon jugs of drinking water, which is inconvenient, costly, and time-consuming.
- Proposed Solution: Establish a local water filling station in Fort Garland.

Economic Development Opportunities from This Initiative:

1. Local Jobs:
 - Staffing and maintaining the station can provide employment opportunities for residents.
2. Supporting Small Business Ecosystem:
 - A water station can attract complementary businesses nearby, such as cafes, convenience stores, or artisan food vendors.
 - Example: Similar projects in rural Colorado have paired community hubs with farmer's markets or local craft spaces, increasing foot traffic and spending.
3. Tourism & Regional Visitors:
 - Visitors passing through Fort Garland for water services may also explore local shops, historic sites, and eateries, injecting new revenue into the local economy.
4. Community Engagement & Ownership:
 - Residents can participate in planning and advisory committees, strengthening civic infrastructure and ensuring the project meets community needs.
 - Example: The Huerfano County community energy project combined renewable energy initiatives with citizen input, creating a stronger sense of ownership and pride ([Huerfano County launches new conservation projects aimed at saving people money](#)).
5. Leverage Grants & Funding:
 - Projects that address basic infrastructure and community health needs can qualify for USDA Rural Business Development Grants, Colorado Rural Jump-Start, or private foundation grants (e.g., El Pomar Foundation).
 - Framing the water station as a community wellness and economic development project makes it more competitive for funding.
 - Example: Fremont County secured grants for infrastructure projects that simultaneously supported business growth and community engagement. ([coloradosun.com](#))

How to Use This Idea as a Launchpad for Local Economic Development

1. Start Small, Scale Later:
 - Launch a pilot water station project to demonstrate feasibility, community demand, and economic benefits.
2. Create a Multi-Use Community Hub:

- Pair the water station with space for local vendors, a small café, or informational kiosks about Fort Garland’s cultural and natural attractions.
- 3. Engage Stakeholders Early:
 - Include residents, local businesses, and county officials in planning to ensure the project meets real needs and builds buy-in.
- 4. Document Impact:
 - Track usage, economic activity, and community satisfaction to strengthen applications for additional grants and to guide future projects.

Conclusion:

By turning the water station need into a community-driven economic development project, SCRO can simultaneously solve a practical challenge, generate local revenue, and create a model for future initiatives—building a foundation for broader rural economic growth.