



Building a Resilience Framework in Colorado

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Introduction

Following the 2012 wildfire season and the 2013 Colorado Floods, Colorado recognized the opportunity to better prepare for natural disasters and coordinate efforts across state agencies to build resilience into their regular operations. In 2015, Colorado became the first state to develop a resilience framework and created the [Colorado Resiliency Office](#) (CRO) with the goal of building more resilient systems in the face of shocks and stressors. The Colorado Resiliency Working Group (CRWG) is an interagency group that meets on a quarterly basis to collaboratively implement and advance resilience actions and goals.

The Colorado Resilience Framework serves as interagency guidance on strengthening resilience and emphasizes finding co-benefits across community sectors, reducing community risk and vulnerability to disruptions, and supporting the state in anticipating and preparing for current and future conditions. The framework is updated every five years to adapt priorities and to keep up with current conditions. Changes from 2015 to 2020 included a shift from focusing heavily on long-term recovery to taking a more holistic approach to resilience. The CRWG is currently working on the 2025 update with a focus on statewide vulnerability where they can have the most impact and prepare for future conditions with available resources. They are also focusing on clear metrics and being able to communicate progress effectively. The state also created a statutory definition of resilience, which has helped with coordination across long-term projects and agencies.

Coordination with Partners

Resiliency work in Colorado is greatly enhanced by working with a wide range of partners that bring their subject matter expertise to the table. As a state with strong local control, Colorado has prioritized working collaboratively with local partners, providing technical assistance and subject matter expertise to support their work on the ground, from planning support to targeted grant programs. This collaboration helps ensure continuity from the state to the local communities.

Colorado's approach to resilience ensures resilience is integrated within its many agencies. For example, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) has continued to evolve and advance their agency's resiliency work. Beginning March 2025, CDPHE developed a monthly internal working group to funnel knowledge into resilience leadership across CDPHE — including environmental health, chronic disease, environmental justice, disease and public health, and air pollution. Their goal is to build partnerships across internal programs and state agencies.

The CRO was first established in the Governor's Office and moved to the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) in 2018. This move strengthened continuity of its long-term work and, given Colorado's strong local control governance structure, enabled the CRO to further the goals of building a more resilient Colorado by partnering with and supporting local governments with planning and technical assistance to build greater resilience.

The CRO offers flexible [Future-Ready Technical Assistance Opportunities](#) for state agencies, which helps them apply adaptability and future-visioning lenses to their resiliency principles in programs and operations. To involve the wider network of resilience practitioners within communities across the state, the CRO launched a community of practice on LinkedIn to foster peer-to-peer learning and dialogue and ensure all voices are heard in a collaborative environment.

The Governor's Office of Climate Preparedness and Disaster Recovery (CPO), facilitates cross agency coordination and collaboration while driving proactive state-wide climate preparedness priorities and supports development of the state's disaster recovery capacity and capabilities. The CPO also coordinates efforts to ensure that the state budget and legislative processes reflect statewide climate preparedness, disaster recovery, and resilience priorities and leads the development of Colorado's [Climate Preparedness Roadmap](#) — a strategic guiding document updated every three years that uses the best available science and data to prioritize near-term climate adaptation actions across Colorado state government.

In collaboration with the implementing state agencies, the first Roadmap, released in 2023, set achievable near-term action items ensuring clear steps to strengthen climate resilience and adaptation. Among the actions, the Roadmap outlined the need to tackle extreme heat through a collaborative interagency approach, while better understanding the unique ways that heat affects Colorado. Social and community capacity were also outlined in the framework as a priority. CDPHE has worked with the Governor's Office to evaluate best practices and strategies tailored for each unique region and implemented their first heat plan in 2024.

Extreme heat can be deadly and is projected to continue to intensify. CPO takes the lead in coordinating extreme heat work across agencies. They are partnering with the Colorado State Forest Service to pilot solutions such as climate-smart tree planting to help keep people safe during high-heat events by reducing ambient neighborhood temperatures and shading individual homes to lower indoor temperatures and reduce cooling costs for residents.

Building Disaster Recovery Capacity

Colorado is investing in disaster preparedness and recovery capacity to reduce the impacts of disasters, help communities recover more effectively, and build resilience into recovery efforts. Ensuring strong recoveries allows for the integration of strategic investments in resilience and hazard mitigation, which the state did in partnership with Xcel Energy — in the wake of the Marshall Fire, the state provided financial assistance to rebuild home to high performance standards and integrated wildfire mitigation actions during the rebuild process.

In recent years, Colorado has expanded their recovery investments, including the addition of key positions in targeted recovery areas including within CPO, at DOLA within the Division of Housing and within the Division of Local Government, at the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and at the Department of Public Health and Environment. Technical expertise and capacity at the agency level is leveraged to strengthen preparedness and to support recovery from state declared disasters through the Colorado Department of Public Safety's State Recovery Task Force, providing recovery expertise when activated according to their assigned Recovery Support Function (RSF).

Colorado partnered with FEMA's State Technical Assistance for Recovery Strategies Program to develop processes and strategies that can be integrated into the RSF plan updates within the State Emergency Operations Plan, and to refine RSF functions, capabilities, and partnerships. Over the last year, the state has additionally conducted numerous discussion-based exercises to strengthen RSF relationships and operational capability.

The state continues to identify and enhance new opportunities in supporting local communities with pre-disaster recovery technical assistance. Examples include:

- Hosting Department of Public Safety-led regional recovery symposiums.
- Piloting additional focused recovery workshops that prioritize rural and less resourced communities.
- Developing and refining disaster recovery planning tools.
- Offering [recovery](#) and [resilience](#) toolkits and expertise to local governments led by DOLA.
- Strengthening integration of disaster considerations into local planning processes.

Colorado implemented this work in summer 2025 when the state experienced numerous wildfires in short succession that received state disaster declarations, activation of the State Recovery Task Force, and required close state-local disaster recovery coordination. Ensuring strong recovery capacity and capabilities is critical to long-term resilience, enabling communities to recover more quickly, more completely, and in ways that integrate proactive resilience strategies.

A Path Towards Long-Term Sustainability

A key element in Colorado's long-term approach to building resiliency is closely involving the local community. Building robust community planning and response capabilities at the local level allows for agencies to tailor plans to community needs and ensures everyone is engaged in the process. The CRO, in collaboration with state agency partners in the CRWG, developed the [Guidance for Local Government Climate Adaptation](#), which provides comprehensive guidance, funding resources, case studies, and connections to state and federal programs that can provide support in over 25 implementable actions.

The CRO has also focused their resiliency work on anticipating what is to come down the road by assessing current and future community needs. An example is the [Rural Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap Program](#), which brought together 16 different regional community teams with over 150 rural jurisdictions and non-governmental partners to support diversifying and strengthening their economies while building regional resiliency following the COVID-19 pandemic. Each regional team developed a roadmap that evaluates local stressors and how conditions may change in the future. This program also looks at what may impact the community from perspectives of housing availability, workforce, and potential resiliency stressors. Another example is the [Camp Resilience: A Rural Prosperity Leadership Academy](#) program, which offers a summer camp themed workshop to build rural community capacity to long-term stressors such as droughts, population loss, climate change, and lack of affordable housing.

While funding cycle ebbs and flows are difficult to predict, Colorado has leveraged a braided funding model which helps support the long-term sustainability of this work while leveraging local, state, and federal resources. This model has been used by states to weave together funding through CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking program, Public Health Infrastructure Grant, state physical activity and nutrition funds, maternal and child health funds, tobacco grant funding, a COVID health grant, as well as EPA funds. As part of the Rural Prosperity Program, the Colorado Resiliency Office offers the Rural Economic Development Initiative grant program to support rural governments in developing workforce plans with a resiliency lens and assess how to diversify the economy. Colorado has also helped with funding and development of local [resilience hubs](#), which help communities plan and respond to localized issues relating to climate change and public health.

Colorado continues to be proactive in building resilience and understands that partnership and collaboration is critical in this space. Investments in developing strategic approaches to strengthening resilience and adapting to Colorado's climate future, like the data-driven Climate Preparedness Roadmap, result in meaningful engagement across diverse entities. This work translates resilience concepts and climate science into digestible and actionable progress. An example of this is the work led by CPO, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and University of Colorado Boulder, that analyzes how changing climate will impact Colorado's workforce at a county-by-county level that can inform workforce professionals in building a climate adapted workforce.

These challenges appear in many places that are not immediately associated with resilience, such as the growing real property insurance availability and affordability challenges. In an effort to address this, earlier this year Colorado passed [HB25-1182: Risk Model Use in Property Insurance Policies](#) that requires for property insurers using a wildfire risk or catastrophe model to share risk scores and information about cost savings associated with mitigation actions with policyholders. This landmark legislation aims to increase transparency and fairness in how insurance policies are priced and incentivize mitigation actions that reduce the risk in the marketplace, especially in climate-vulnerable areas.

Given how cross-cutting this work is, Colorado has built a centralized location where people can explore how Colorado is acting on climate, including the state's climate [adaptation](#) work, and built a platform with a host of [resiliency resources](#) for those involved in community resiliency.

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