

University of Colorado Boulder  
Leeds School of Business  
**Deming Center for Entrepreneurship**

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***Driving Economic Growth within Native Communities  
through Entrepreneurship Education***



GCEC Awards Application Category: **Excellence in Specialty Entrepreneurship Education**

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## Target Audience & Genesis of Program

For over 20 years, rural Colorado communities have suffered from stagnant economic growth, resulting in a decline in the quality of life and the population of those under 18 years old. Thanks to the vigilance of Economic Development Officer Wendell Pryor from Chaffee County, Colorado, the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship was made aware of the economic struggles faced by rural Colorado communities in 2015, and together we set out to solve the problem with the creation of the first-ever Rural Colorado Workshop in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Focused on elevating economic growth and entrepreneurship education in rural communities, the successful launch of the Rural Colorado Workshop ignited the series, which has resulted in eight locations over nine years, hosting over 50 workshops, and equipping over a thousand rural entrepreneurs with the tools to better their businesses and communities.

After seeing several years of the workshop's success, the Southern Ute Tribe in Ignacio, Colorado, contacted us to expand the program to their tribe in 2021. With the tribe leading the way, we created the Native Entrepreneurship Workshop Series to build economic growth within Colorado's Native populations, bridging the gap between communities and teaching them how to think like entrepreneurs to better navigate the challenges and opportunities that come with living on or near tribal land.

## Framework of Program

- I. **What:** The [Native Entrepreneurship Workshop Series](#) is an interactive certificate course for tribal members and additional community members interested in launching their own businesses or improving an existing one. In addition, local tribal chiefs and government leaders seeking to help innovate within their tribe attend the workshop series. It provides a fundamental framework and toolkit to develop sought-after products and services, avoid pitfalls, and understand how to utilize local funding and business resources.
- II. **When:** Native entrepreneurship workshops are offered every summer.
- III. **Who:** We target aspiring entrepreneurs, current entrepreneurs, tribal leaders, tribal councils, and economic development officers within all the major Native reservations in Southern Colorado. The Southern Ute Tribe is our primary collaborator, but we have taught others such as the Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute, Apache and Alaskan Natives.
- IV. **How:** Native entrepreneurship workshops are developed and led by native specialists and local community leaders in collaboration with the University of Colorado Boulder faculty who provide structure and entrepreneurship expertise.
- V. **Why:** To drive economic and social vitality. Historically, Native tribal members have higher unemployment, decreased savings and job experience, and live in isolated geographic locations. Entrepreneurial skills drive economic growth and prosperity within reservations suffering from systemic oppression, discrimination, and other obstacles faced by Native groups in the United States. These workshops aim to increase Native communities' economic state by teaching creative problem-solving and effective business practices so aspiring entrepreneurs and local Native leaders have resources to generate individual wealth and increase their reservation's prosperity.

## Expected Outcomes

- I. **Economic Development:** Our team has committed to providing Native Entrepreneurship education for five years. Throughout the five years, this workshop series is dedicated to driving economic growth in these Native communities by providing the resources and education asked for by the Native tribes to help develop new ventures and create jobs.
- II. **Community Impact:** A goal of this workshop is to empower tribal members to have impact within their tribe, as Native communities are often driven by the creation of jobs within their community, language preservation, and generational artisan skills over profit. Entrepreneurship is a way for them to continue to pass down their art and skills to future generations, as well as make it an economically beneficial path.
- III. **Building Bridges:** One key area of this program is building bridges between the Native communities and local entrepreneurs and changemakers to help foster a collaborative ecosystem beyond the boundaries of the reservation. Each of the workshops consist of roughly 75% Native and 25% non-native attendees.

- IV. **Job creation:** These workshops help rural Native communities and their entrepreneurs think innovatively about attracting, retaining and growing their venture base and creating new jobs.
- V. **Increased access to entrepreneurial education.** We go directly to disadvantaged rural communities who otherwise would not have access to world-class teaching and tools.

### **Participants**

- I. Aspiring and current Native entrepreneurs and small-to-medium sized business owners
- II. Economic development officers
- III. Government officials (tribal council members, tribal leaders)
- IV. Students (high school and community college)
- V. Community leaders (business owners, retirees interested in starting a business)

### **Partners** (this is key!)

- I. **Native specialists and local community leaders in SW Colorado:** These workshops rely heavily on the leadership and support of our local partners. We partner with the Economic Development Coordinator of the [Southern Ute Tribe](#) for their connection to the tribe and expertise in elevating the economy within their reservation, and our faculty facilitate the teaching of the workshop. We also partner with the [Southwest Colorado Small Business Development Center](#) and [Fort Lewis College Center for Innovation](#) whose members contain large subsets of tribal members from surrounding reservations. The collaboration and support of our partners builds stronger partnerships within the community and have led to further support from local hotels, restaurants, printers, etc. It is truly a grassroots, community-led effort that delivers a successful program with long-term impact.
- II. **Cross-Campus Units:** This is a true cross-disciplinary effort. We have partnered with the University of Colorado Boulder's [First Peoples Worldwide](#), an on-campus center dedicated to addressing social and environmental impacts of development in indigenous communities. We also work with the College of Engineering & Applied Sciences, Colorado Law, International English Center, Office of Government Relations, the Office of Outreach, and more, to create and conduct an applicable and helpful workshop series for all attendees.
- III. **Colorado Governor's Office:** Our Rural Colorado Workshop Series has gained notoriety and traction throughout the state. We have received support from the Governor's office for our contacts within rural Colorado communities and administrative support. This directly translates to support from the Governor's Office for our Native-specific location.
- IV. **Office of Outreach Engagement:** Our Office of Outreach Engagement is highly supportive and involved in our communications, promotion, and the overall goal of economic development within native communities throughout Colorado thanks to recognition from the [2022 Community Impact Grant](#).

### **Unique characteristics**

- I. **Rural communities:** The majority of outreach and community development programs focus on major city centers. Our entrepreneurship workshops focus exclusively on declining rural Colorado communities that can be up to eight hours from the closest major city and lack the resources and economic development to retain talent. The Native location sits 40 minutes outside of the nearest mid-size city of Durango, which in itself is hours from a major metro area.
- II. **Customization of Curriculum:** Being a Native entrepreneur comes with its own set of challenges, which is why we customize our curriculum to address their obstacles. For example, raising funds is extra challenging for Native entrepreneurs since most tribal communities do not own their land. This lack of collateral is extra challenging when applying for traditional debt funding and taking out loans. We bring specialized experts to address these challenges and provide resources within the community.
- III. **Five-year commitment:** Before setting up the workshop series, we observed workshop and event success in rural Colorado. We observed longer-term commitments can positively benefit local communities by establishing relationships, offering ongoing support throughout each year, and celebrating long-term business success among the community. This approach has been tremendously successful with more reliable partners and the dependability of our program to drive momentum for entrepreneurship and innovation.
- IV. **Continuing support:** Our commitment is more than a 1.5-day workshop. We help with community building and elevation of the local business ecosystems. Similar to (III) above, our

faculty are available for questions from attendees and local community leaders year-round, not just during the workshop. For example, our faculty accept phone calls and emails from participants when questions arise or when they want to pitch their ideas. We have also extended support for local pitch competitions, such as one led by our Logan County team in June of 2023.

- V. **Open to All Tribal Communities:** Native events are usually restricted to individual tribes and not open to the surrounding tribal communities due to historical legacies. This workshop is not only open to all, but encourages surrounding tribal community participation. This past year, we gathered attendees from five different tribal communities, some of which have historically had conflict, to come together to collaborate and elevate their communities.
- VI. **Building Trust within the Tribal Community:** For the past two years, we have spent time listening to and understanding the needs of the Southern Ute Tribe and the surrounding tribal communities through ongoing check-ins with our partners. During these years of development, we were able to create a strong and trustworthy partnership with these communities. This foundation enabled us to really understand what kind of workshop experience would better elevate their community and drive economic growth.

### **Replication of Program**

- I. We are happy to provide the playbook for our Native Entrepreneurship Workshop Series and have conversations with other schools interested in implementing similar initiatives! We have already helped multiple schools implement programs in Wyoming and Utah. Please see above for the unique characteristics we recommend each school consider when creating a similar program.
- II. We have included additional information (advertisements, teaching framework, logistics) in the appendix that may also be helpful.
- III. Please note that this is not an executive education effort. The focus is community service and outreach. Tuition for these workshops is heavily discounted and subsidized with the goal of breaking even. For example, the first program was \$25 per attendee. Some locations charge more for the workshop based on participant demographics, however we desire to create an environment where the attendees have a stake in the workshop with the implementation of a minimal fee.

### **Achievements to Date**

- I. **Creating a Collaborative and Trustworthy Relationship:** This workshop took years of collaboration, insights, and learning to be accepted into the Southern Ute tribe. After years of building a trusting relationship, this community welcomed us to support their entrepreneurs!
- II. **Attendance Growth:** From year one to year two, our workshop attendance increased by 400%.
- III. **Successful Launching of 17 Native Businesses:** Since the launch of this program, we have seen the successful growth and creation of 17 Native businesses. Some of our favorites include a bilingual childcare service, a trucking business in the Navajo Nation, and an Internet Transaction Machine company.
- IV. **Bridging Gaps between Surrounding Tribes with Historical Tension:** The Native tribes in Colorado have historically shared some tension. As a result, some tribal members do not attend events outside of their communities, are hesitant to quickly collaborate together, or feel uncomfortable working with others outside of their community. We are proud to share that this workshop has helped to bridge the gap between such tribes, with members of the Southern Ute Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute, Apache and the Navajo Nation all in attendance this past year.
- V. **Grant Awardee & Features In Native Press:** This workshop is the recipient of the 2022 Community Impact Grant from the University of Colorado Boulder Office of Outreach Engagement. This grant has enabled us to expand this workshop beyond the Southern Ute Reservation and pay for travel expenses and specialty educators. It was also written about in multiple sources of press throughout the states, such as the [Southern Drum](#) and [Indian Country Today](#).
- VI. **Teaching Excellence:** Seven faculty members have participated in this program, experimenting with different teaching approaches and testing new tools and worksheets. We have achieved a 98.3/100 average customer satisfaction rating for our workshops. This has translated to even better teaching performance in the classroom as well.

**Appendix:**

- a. Playbook for Operations & Creation of Program
- b. Program Press Release



**Rural Colorado Workshop Series: Playbook**  
**Deming Center for Entrepreneurship**  
**University of Colorado Boulder - Leeds School of Business**



**Program Overview**

The Rural Colorado Workshop Series is an interactive certificate course for anyone interested in launching his or her own business or improving upon an existing business, as well as local government officials seeking to help innovate within their organizations. It provides a fundamental framework and toolset that helps entrepreneurs develop sought-after products and services, avoid pitfalls and succeed at entrepreneurship.

These workshops are taught by experts from the Leeds School of Business at CU Boulder. The goal of these workshops is to increase the economic state of rural Colorado through the teaching of effective business practices. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, this series is meant to help elevate the conversation around entrepreneurship & innovation in your community and inspire members to think and act like entrepreneurs - vs being resistant to change and staying stagnant.

In every region we bring this program to, we make a firm 5-year regional commitment to community leadership. Our workshops are based off an evolving structure, wherein we teach our introductory workshop, Launch Your Idea (formerly Demystifying Entrepreneurship), for years 1-2; Startup 2 Scaleup in years 3-4; and our capstone course of Suring Up the final year

of our engagement. The purpose of this tiered structure is to provide support to businesses at all stages of operation, from ideation to scale.

Examples of relationships we have built so far include the communities in the Central Mountain Region (Buena Vista), Northwest Colorado (Vail Valley) and Southwest Colorado (Telluride). Southeast CO (Trinidad) and NE Colorado (Sterling).

The following document will cover in-depth the marketing and logistical materials required to run one of these workshops.

**We provide:**

- Expert faculty from the Leeds School of Business to teach and coach small business owners and future entrepreneurs
- Custom curriculum developed in-house for a 1.5 day, interactive certificate course
- Support for creating marketing material and spreading the word
- Logistical and operations support
- Ongoing coaching and mentoring to the community
- A 5-year commitment to partner with your community to help elevate the narrative around entrepreneurship & innovation

**Community Provides:**

- One community champion to act as point-of-contact for Leeds School staff and faculty, and lead marketing and outreach efforts
- The upfront cost for communities is typically around \$6,000; this cost can be significantly offset by in-kind donations, and is often recuperated through ticket sales
- Identification of venue for workshop
- Food and beverage
- Registration page
- Identification of marketing channels & creation of marketing materials
- Hospitality arrangements for Leeds staff & faculty
- A 5-year commitment to host the workshop series for sustainable growth

**Marketing**

**Necessary promotional materials**

The following pieces of collateral are required to successfully market a Demystifying Entrepreneurship workshop. You will find attached example materials for each of the following:

- One-page flyer — Save the Date
- One-page flyer — Program overview and registration
- One-page flyer — Information for soliciting sponsorship from local companies, including but not limited to: hotel, food & bev providers, and workshop venue
- General copy for newsletters, emails, and social media posts (see “Marketing channels” below)

In addition, the creation of a registration page/landing page for the event is required. This should serve as both a deposit of information for attendees, as well as a sign-up page. We recommend utilizing an event management tool such as Eventbrite to run registration for the event (we have had community partners utilize Facebook for event registration; while permissible, the required account to use Facebook may be a restricting factor for some would-be attendees).

The registration page should include the following information:

- Description of workshop
  - Who should attend
  - Learnings for each participant
  - Faculty bios
- Location of venue
- Time/date for both the evening reception and full day workshop
- Include that registration for the course will be capped at 50 attendees

### **Marketing channels**

Below is an example of a marketing channels from our Vail program. We recommend a similar multi-pronged, multi-channel approach for all communities hosting this workshop.

- *Presentations, interviews and in-person speaking engagements:* Vail Rotary; Edwards Rotary; Vail's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Planning Committee; Eagle County Commissioners; Northwest Colorado Council of Governments; Colorado Small Business Association Regional Directors; Vail's Economic Advisory Council; Vail Valley Young Professionals Association; BaseCamp for Entrepreneurs; and 8150 High Altitude Entrepreneurs.
- *Email blasts to members of:* Vail Valley Partnership; Vail Valley Young Professionals Association; Vail Chamber & Business Association; BaseCamp for Entrepreneurs; 8150 High Altitude Entrepreneurs; Eagle Chamber of Commerce; Colorado Small Business Association; Elevate Breckenridge and Frisco co-working; Vail Valley Business Women Association; Simpati Coworking Eagle; Vail's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Planning Committee; and Mountain Careers.
- *Flyers:* Colorado Mountain College – Edwards campus; Grand County; Garfield County; Pitkin and Summit County.
- *Newspaper/online ads:* Vail and Summit Daily newspapers.
- *E-newsletters:* Vail Centre weekly; Vail Chamber and Business Association weekly; Vail Valley Partnership weekly; Vail Valley Young Professionals Association weekly; Northwest Colorado Council of Governments bi-weekly; and the University of Colorado's Deming Centre for Entrepreneurship.
- *Social media:* Vail Centre, Telluride Foundation, Southwest Innovation Corridor, and the University of Colorado Deming Centre for Entrepreneurship Facebook pages.
- *Personal emails:* Participant specific email targeting.

### **Timeline**



<b>Three months out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community partner(s) identified</li> <li>• Dates for workshop/reception selected</li> <li>• Budget established</li> <li>• Save the date sent out to appropriate marketing channels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Recommended: social media, targeted emails</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Two months out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach potential event sponsors for food &amp; bev, hotel arrangements for faculty, venue</li> <li>• Registration page created</li> </ul>
<b>Six weeks out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin formal marketing campaign with materials that include registration page</li> <li>• Reach out to local entrepreneurs for 3-4 person panel discussion</li> <li>• Scholarships made available and advertised</li> <li>• Specific invitations sent to community leaders and local government officials</li> <li>• “Early Bird” marketing special promotion pricing (recommended) begins in advertising</li> </ul>
<b>One month out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality arrangements for program faculty and staff confirmed</li> <li>• Venue confirmed</li> <li>• Food &amp; bev for both evenings confirmed</li> </ul>
<b>Two weeks out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Early Bird” pricing model ends</li> <li>• Scholarships awarded</li> <li>• 3-4 person panel - final confirmation</li> </ul>
<b>One week out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication with attendees: homework provided</li> <li>• Confirm A/V availability for both reception &amp; workshop</li> <li>• Name tents created</li> <li>• Certificates printed</li> </ul>
<b>Day of reception</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food &amp; bev, including alcoholic beverages, confirmed</li> <li>• Venue setup (seating, tables, check w/ catering for cutlery, etc.)</li> <li>• Materials for evening provided</li> <li>• Name tents set out</li> <li>• Workshop and reception materials/exercises printed</li> </ul>

<b>Morning of workshop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name tents set out</li> <li>• A/V tested</li> <li>• Certificates prepared; print certificates for last-minute registrants</li> </ul>
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## Logistics & Budget

### **Required items**

Below is a list of all of the arrangements and physical items needed for a Demystifying Entrepreneurship workshop.

- Local champion/point person
  - This individual should be intimately familiar with the local ecosystem. They will play point for marketing and operational efforts, as well as be the main point of contact for the Deming Center/Leeds team. In the past, we have worked with economic development officials and SBDC officers as champions to great success; we find that anyone invested and impassioned by economic development for the region makes a strong program partner.
- 2 rooms for 2 nights at local hotel
- Venue for evening reception and full-day workshop
  - Evening Reception:
    - Capacity for 50+ attendees; invitation for community members involved in entrepreneurship recommended
    - Networking space
  - Workshop:
    - A/V required
    - Capacity for 50 attendees required
    - Classroom-style or U-Shape setup
- Food and beverage for evening reception and full-day workshop
  - Evening reception
    - Alcoholic beverages for attendees
    - Heavy appetizers
  - Workshop
    - Breakfast
    - Lunch
    - Full day of coffee!
- Marketing materials (above)
- 3-4 local entrepreneurs to participate in lunchtime panel (day of workshop)
- Certificates

### **Budget**

You will find attached an example of a budget, including the line items required to run a workshop. Although we quote a community a cost of approximately \$6,000 to run the workshop, we typically see that cost significantly reduced thanks to partnerships and sponsorships developed prior to the workshop. For example, food and beverage may be donated by a local caterer who is seeking visibility in the small business community.

In addition, communities may set their own ticket pricing for the workshops. We recommend keeping the price as affordable as possible for the community's constituency (for example, in Buena Vista, the workshop cost is \$100 per attendee). The ticket sales may also help to greatly offset the cost of putting on a workshop. Finally, we ask that a \$500 stipend be provided to each CU faculty member to assist with travel costs.

### **Keys to A Successful Workshop!**

1. *A dedicated, passionate community champion.* We love to partner with an individual or organization who is truly excited and committed to elevating their community, leading to business starts, growing companies and job creation.
2. *A 5-year commitment.* This assures a consistent, sustainable focus on creating innovators in your community.
3. *Community partnership.* Successful programs have been built from the ground up with the community leading the way; for example, local restaurants donating the food, local hotels donating rooms and space, and overall seeing the local business community coming together to help build this program.
4. *FUN!* Let's elevate your community and enjoy the ride!





## Second Annual Demystifying Native Entrepreneurship in Southwest Colorado

May 19, 2022 • By Stefani Harrison

**[Sky Ute Casino, Ignacio, Colorado, May 14, 2022]** In the beautiful foothills of southwestern Colorado, just shy of the Rio Grande and San Juan National Forests, lies the community of Ignacio, home to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. This awe-inspiring area holds more than just the beauty of its land. It harbors the resilience, dedication, and ingenuity of its people.

From Modular Homes to Internet Transaction Machines (ITMs), the people of Ignacio and the surrounding areas address community needs and provide for themselves and their families. It is with the greatest honor that the [Southern Ute Tribe](#) and [Deming Center for Entrepreneurship](#) at the University of Colorado Boulder hosted year two of the [Demystifying Native Entrepreneurship Workshop](#) at [Sky Ute Casino](#) this past weekend.

Nearly 20 Native and rural participants joined together for this two-day workshop to learn from [Erick Mueller](#) and [Eric Burno](#), entrepreneurs and award-winning professors at the [Leeds School of Business](#). The workshop focused on sowing the framework for developing sought-after products and services, strategies to increase sales, funding opportunities, and how to avoid entrepreneurial pitfalls. Rural entrepreneurs and Native entrepreneurs from the [Southern Ute Tribe](#), [Ute Mountain Ute](#), and the [Navajo Nation](#) came together to build their networks and help their communities thrive.

Erick Mueller shared "I was inspired by the amazing collaboration amongst the entire southwest Colorado community that included Native and local entrepreneurs sharing ideas and moving innovations forward. I can't wait to learn of the success of these entrepreneurs and local leaders!"

These inspiring entrepreneurs came with a focus on growth for their communities, their businesses, and themselves. [Kayla Toledo](#), a brilliant student at Fort Lewis College, used the workshop to develop her bilingual childcare service. She plans to use her skills as a bilingualist to help children in her community develop better language and cognitive skills. A Southern Ute Native, Holly Begay worked to further develop [Towering House](#)

[Soapery](#), where she produces beautiful handcrafted artisan soaps that shares the authenticity of her Native work.

The next stage of [Demystifying Entrepreneurship Workshop Series](#), StartUp to ScaleUp, will return to Ignacio in the **Spring of 2023**. Join us next year to learn how second-stage small businesses and organizations can transition past the startup phase and into what's next. [Receive updates about next year's workshop](#).

This series of workshops is put on in partnership with the [Deming Center for Entrepreneurship](#) at the [University of Colorado Boulder's Leeds School of Business](#) and is available in every major rural region in Colorado. The next Demystifying Workshop, [StartUp to ScaleUp](#), will be in Sterling, Colorado, July 22 to 23. To register for this event, [check out the website](#).

And to learn about all locations, visit our [Demystifying Entrepreneurship: Rural Colorado Workshop Series website](#).