

Laura Valdez
Co-Executive Director, Fort Collins Museum of Discovery

Laura serves as executive director of the nonprofit partner at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery (FCMoD), a public-private partnership established with the City of Fort Collins in 2008. FCMoD creates extraordinary opportunities for visitors to engage with the interplay between science and culture in ways that are deeply relevant to the community's identity, geography and shared history. Accredited in 2018 by the American Alliance of Museums and regularly recognized as a top destination in Colorado, FCMoD has enjoyed visits from more than 850,000 people of all ages since opening the new campus in 2012.

Whether serving in the education, public or nonprofit sectors, Laura's work is driven by a desire create and facilitate opportunities for all to experience success and deepened connection. At age 20, Laura was asked by the City of Rockford, Illinois to serve as the inaugural executive director for a teen center focused on building the foundation to change the community's historically low educational outcomes. Lessons learned from her time in Rockford served Laura as she transitioned into roles as a middle school English teacher and ultimately in community-based municipal work. Laura spent nearly a decade working in local government, with the last three years serving the City of Elgin, Illinois as its Assistant City Manager. Her work ranged from recalibrating the organization's focus on inclusion and diversity, to overseeing the development of a new 311 Contact Center with related cloud-based technology transitions, to serving as the City's point-person for stabilization efforts of the nonprofit sector during the State of Illinois' two-year budget impasse.

Governor Jared Polis appointed Laura to the Colorado Tourism Board in July 2020, where she also serves as co-chair the inaugural Inclusivity in Travel Advisory Group and vice-chair for the Destination Development Committee. Laura earned her Master of Public Administration from Northern Illinois University where she continues to serve on the Board of Advisors for the Department of Public Administration. She obtained her bachelor's in English and Secondary Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.