



COLORADO
Blueprint 2.0



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2016-2017 Blueprint 2.0 | Tourism Promotion & Development Rio Blanco County

Rio Blanco County, located in northwest Colorado, was selected as a Colorado Blueprint 2.0 Tourism Promotion and Development project during the inaugural year of Colorado's Blueprint 2.0 Initiative. This case study shares information about the Blueprint 2.0 Initiative, Rio Blanco County's Tourism Promotion & Development track project, initial outcomes from the project and steps forward. It also provides advice for other communities who might engage in a Blueprint 2.0 Tourism project.

About Blueprint 2.0 and the Tourism Promotion & Development Track

Colorado Blueprint 2.0's purpose is to examine how best to support the economic development goals of rural and small communities around the state, and to leverage and deploy resources in service of those goals. Eleven areas were developed in support of this vision and through feedback from communities. One of these areas was Tourism Promotion & Development.

Specifically, Colorado Tourism Office's (CTO) efforts to raise awareness of and appreciation for tourism statewide, initiated a peer-assistance and training program for regions and destinations that want to improve or expand their own tourism assets. Three communities/ regions were selected to be paired with a peer expert based on the specific needs of that community, the development of a scope of work, deliverables and timeframe developed by community and mentor during first stage of initiative, and where possible, continued support from the CTO.

Rio Blanco County's Tourism Promotion Initiative

Rio Blanco County engaged a variety of partners in contributing to this initiative, including community members from Meeker and Rangley. Katelin Cook, Economic Development Coordinator for Rio Blanco County served as Project Lead. Three specific areas were identified on which to make progress through Blueprint 2.0, including:

- (1) Assess and understand the tourism assets in Rio Blanco, recognizing that Meeker and Rangley have different offerings, opportunities, and needs, and that assets may be at different stages of development. What's being pursued and what assets haven't yet been tapped into?
- (2) Value the available and potential tourism assets-- What assets are worth investing in and promoting further to realize their potential? What is the potential economic impact?
- (3) Marketing Rio Blanco County's tourism assets-- Who are our primary audiences, how do we effectively reach them, and how can we be competitive?

In support of these goals, Katelin and her team worked closely with Colorado Tourism office to learn about existing opportunities offered by the office, and also worked with Russell Walters, with Adventure Travel Trade Association, to design and deliver a two day community workshop to understand adventure travel trends, assess local community assets and to identify challenges and opportunities. During the second day, the participants focused on how to market Rio Blanco as a region. Following this initial learning, planning, and assessment work, Rio Blanco then worked with a marketing consultant who helped the County develop a specific written action plan to further the region's tourism goals and resulting economic benefit.



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Outcomes – Tourism Promotion

Rio Blanco identifies the following outcomes from their Blueprint 2.0 tourism project:

“We have an action plan that we're implementing. We have a new group of engaged people that are helping to implement it.” – Project Lead

“One really positive thing that has come out of this is our relationship with the state. I really do believe it's because of Blueprint...we're seeing more opportunity from the state coming to our county in the last 3-4 months than ever before... they see your successes and know you can carry something through...” – Project Lead

In the year that's followed completion of the initial project, additional opportunities in tourism have opened up in Rio Blanco County, which they have successfully pursued, including:

- Representation on CTO's Destination Development Committee.
- Receipt of \$7,500 in Blueprint implementation funds from CTO, to help implement a portion of their marketing plan, including to develop marketing materials that can be available in print and online, website improvement, online advertising through a Colorado.com display ad, tapping into the Matador network and investing in the CTO social media program.
- Reapplied and received a round 2 Blueprint 2.0 project to assess the impact of local marketing efforts, to determine how to best use limited funds for the greatest impact, and to support small tourism businesses in better marketing their attractions.
- Tourism partners in Rio Blanco County coordinated efforts to submit a comprehensive tourism marketing grant application, receiving nearly \$13,000 in state funding. Rio Blanco County, Meeker Chamber of Commerce, Rangely Area Chamber of Commerce and the Meeker Classic Sheepdog Trials submitted a proposal to enhance tourism marketing, utilizing an online, social media, print, radio, billboard and tradeshow attendance marketing strategy.

Challenges and Next Steps

Regarding the initial application and implementation of Blueprint, budgeting was a challenge:

“When I did my 2016 budget, Blueprint 2.0 was nowhere on my radar because it didn't exist. I had already developed my budget. For 2017, I built in the Blueprint into my budget and align my time and staff with it. [What we experienced were] probably growing pains of the 1st year.” – Project Lead

In addition, making the most of a small marketing budget continues to be a primary focus and challenge, as well as seeking additional sources of funds.

Going forward, Rio Blanco County is maintaining a lot of momentum out of Blueprint—applying for additional funding sources, keeping their community stakeholders engaged, and working through another Blueprint 2.0 project that will wrap up in spring of 2018.



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What Worked About Rio Blanco County's Blueprint 2.0 Experience

Rio Blanco County was the recipient of three separate Blueprint 2.0 projects in the inaugural year. Participants felt their Colorado Tourism Office project was the most successful, due to dedicated mentorship, resources and project management/ partnership.

"Tourism was our most successful because you start with an initial meeting, you outline what the end goal was...at end of day we've got that plan, we're implementing that plan....you have this mentor on the tourism one helping guide, saying 'have you thought about it this way'...there's just a little bit more mentorship, that to me made all the difference." – Project Lead

Advice for Other Communities

"Be really clear with what your expectations are for what you want to get out of this. If your expectations don't match what they can offer, you're not going to get the funding." – Project Lead

Why Blueprint 2.0 Matters

"One of the greatest accomplishments coming from this Blueprint 2.0 initiative is the renewed interest in tourism promotion and development. Several agencies and individuals that were not previously engaged in tourism are now greatly engaged, bringing new skill sets, financial resources and creative ideas to the table. Prior to this initiative, community members always said "someone should market our tourism assets."

Now, we have a united working group of about 20 people working to market our tourism assets. This will lead to greater promotion outreach, stronger marketing materials and greater community collaboration. All of these things are "wins" for our rural communities and the State of Colorado!" – Project Lead

To Learn More or Apply to the Program

Please visit the Blueprint 2.0 website:

<http://choosecolorado.com/programs-initiatives/colorado-blueprint/>

Questions?

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Photograph is from Rio Blanco County's official website, which can be found at
<http://www.co.rio-blanco.co.us/>