

2024 Local Ballot Measure After-Action Review

*Reflections from Grand County, La Plata County,
and City of Montrose on their Lodging Tax Success*



WELCOME

[Colorado's Early Childhood Framework](#) has a vision that all of Colorado's children are valued, healthy, and thriving. The framework states: "Every Coloradan has a role to play in making our state the best place for children to grow and learn. No single person, organization, or agency holds the resources or capacity to achieve the state's shared vision alone. Instead, success will require everyone to roll up their sleeves and take action in some way."

According to a [2024 Council for a Strong America report](#), in Colorado 64% of families with children ages five and under have all available parents in the workforce. And families with an infant and a four-year-old are paying on average 38% of their household income on child care. Our care system is currently too costly for parents, and yet the true cost of care is subsidized by the low wages provided to the early childhood education workforce. As Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen noted in a [2021 speech](#), child care is a classic example of a market failure. Evidenced in one of our own Colorado communities, [La Plata County's Early Childcare Strategic Investment Plan](#) reminds us that this isn't just a family issue, it's a community and business issue. Surveys in La Plata County point out that every *business depends on child care*:

- Due to insufficient child care capacity, La Plata County experiences economic detriment up to \$34 million annually in lost wages alone.
- 60% of employers have lost employees directly to child care issues, while 54% face ongoing hiring challenges linked to child care accessibility.
- 26% of employers reported losing five or more employees in the past two years due to child care gaps.
- Only 6% of employers report adequate child care access for their workforce, leading some businesses to consider relocation due to workforce instability.

With that in mind, we celebrate local communities that are rolling up their sleeves, raising revenue, and funding solutions that leverage their unique assets and resources to create a better-supported and more well-functioning child care system. Local funding is a necessary yet insufficient amount of money to truly support families and the caregiving workforce. It is our hope that sharing lessons learned and stories of success from local communities will light the way for the level of investment necessary to achieve Colorado's vision.

Thanks for sharing your stories with us, providing a roadmap for others to follow, and investing in Colorado's future!



Jason Callegari

Director, Initiatives | Buell Foundation

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BACKGROUND

Affordable and accessible child care in Colorado is widely recognized as one of the most pressing and complex issues facing families and local economies. As communities wrestle with increased cost of living and a convergence of competing needs, including child care, more are turning to local financing models to support the ongoing funding necessary to support children, families, caregivers, and by extension, employers and local economic interests.

In 2024, three Colorado communities successfully ran local ballot measures to strengthen child care. (A ballot measure is a law, issue, or topic placed on a statewide, county, or municipal ballot for voters to decide through an election.) These communities—**Grand County, La Plata County, and the City of Montrose**—each increased and/or reallocated a portion of their lodging tax to child care among other allowable community priorities. The Buell Foundation commissioned a report to better understand their stories.

THE GOALS OF THIS EFFORT



Gather insights on **campaign origin, process, facilitators, and lessons learned**



Compile insights on the role Buell and other funders could play to **better support more communities** interested in local financing opportunities

Through information gathered from interviews with key stakeholders, this report outlines the facilitators of **success, common lessons, and opportunities for future support.**

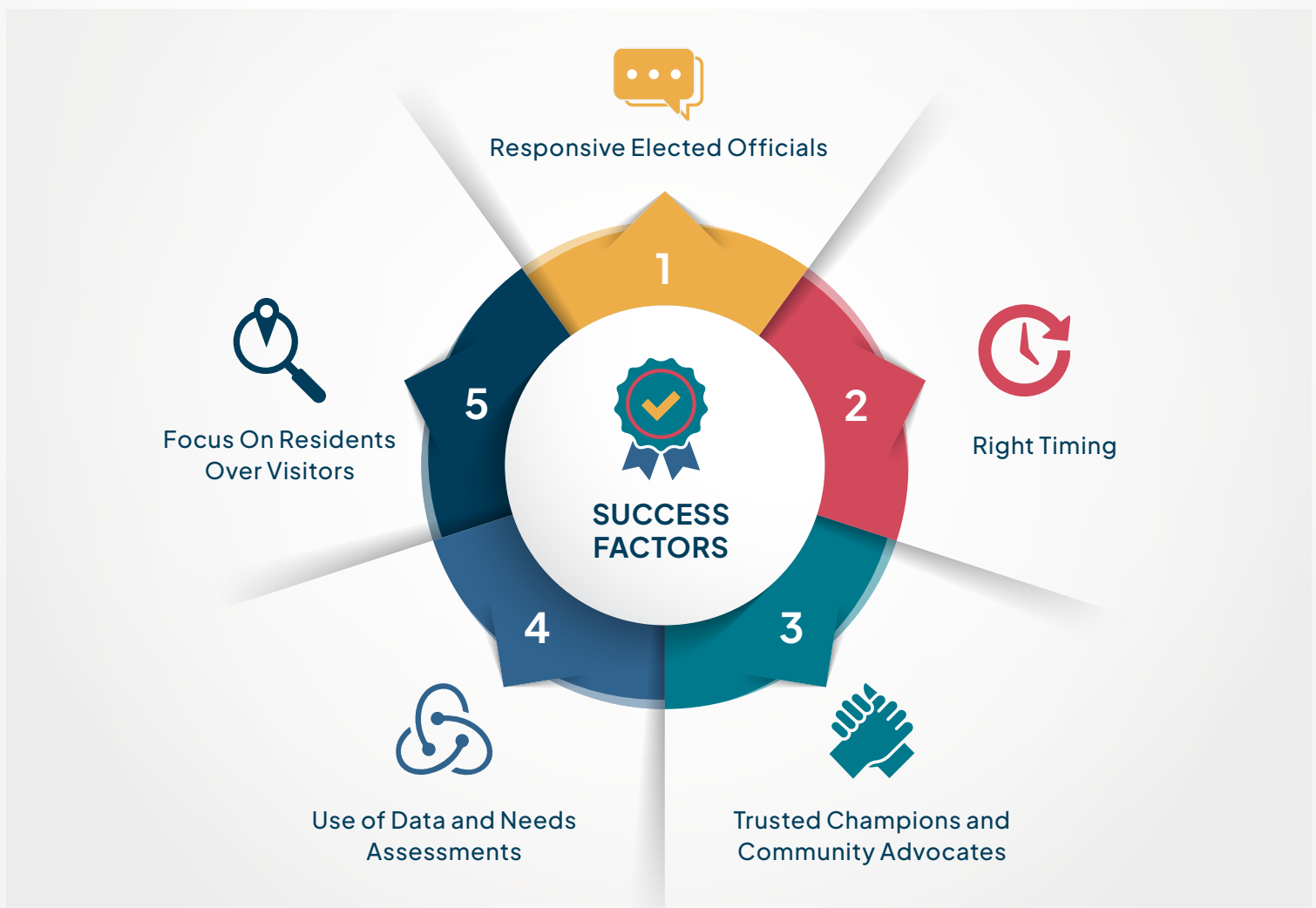
BACKGROUND

FACILITATORS OF SUCCESS

Each community's success was built on a combination of current community context and availability of resources and expertise. The following section discusses common themes and unique characteristics that played a role in ballot measure success.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

All three communities are located in rural parts of the state, and all have a thriving tourism economy. They share a mix of conservative and progressive politics, with Grand and Montrose County voting majority Republican in the last election. All three communities have seen increases in the cost of living that outpace average income. A few factors stood out as contributing to the successful passage of the measures, including:



BACKGROUND



Responsive Elected Officials

In all three cases, city and county elected officials and staff drove the move to put the measures on the ballot. They may have been informed by a growing expression of community need, but the lodging tax as one potential solution was initiated by them rather than by organized coalitions. Savvy and determined city and county staff ensured a steady focus on anticipating and completing each necessary step in the process. Across communities, stakeholders speculated that it helped the issue gain traction when city or county officials had young children of their own and were in the throes of finding and paying for child care.



Right Timing

In each case, something made 2024 the time to move. For Grand County, a new process for county commissioners to identify strategic priorities had just been completed. In La Plata County, the local tourism organization which historically received all lodging tax funds was “politically wounded” at the time the reallocation was put forward, which decreased potential business opposition. The City of Montrose had recently participated in a community engagement model facilitated by a national organization to identify solutions to community needs, spurring increased awareness and a vision for how additional funding could be used.

Some leaders speculated about the relative speed at which the lodging tax measures came together and were approved. This was largely seen as an advantage, noting that it was hard to say whether there was little opposition because it was so widely popular, or because there was no time to organize against it. Similarly, in the case of Montrose, a full ballot may have led to potential opposition having too many issues in the field to focus on one.

Chris Ottinger, Community Development Specialist with the City of Montrose reflected, “The timing for this was fortuitous and we may have received a bit more push-back on an off-year election or with fewer items on the ballot. With elections and several other ballot measures including a large school district bond proposal, this was less of a focus in the public eye. In addition, the proposal raises the taxes on those traveling to Montrose and not on the residents themselves, which was viewed favorably by voters.”

BACKGROUND



Trusted Champions and Community Advocates

Across all three counties, a recurring theme was the importance of having long-standing, passionate advocates who built relationships over years. These individuals were often the connective tissue between policy, practice, and community. Their credibility, persistence, and visibility allowed the issue of child care to remain at the forefront of public discourse. Champions were present in different roles in communities. Passionate parents and child care providers were named as conveners, organizers, and outspoken advocates for the issue. Particularly in the case of La Plata County, a county commissioner served as a “bridge” between Spanish-speaking residents and the political process.

While the Lodging Tax process was initiated by City and County officials in each case, local early childhood experts answered the call to support the passage of the measure. In all three cases, the Early Childhood Councils played an integral role in sharing data, organizing partners, and fundraising. This was facilitated by the well-respected, credible leaders in these institutions, and the existing relationships they had already forged.



Use of Data and Needs Assessments

Data was critical not only for building the case for local investment but also for shaping messages that resonated with voters and decision-makers. Updated and localized assessments helped position child care as an economic and workforce development issue.

Chrissy Simmons, founder of Bloom Educational Consulting and Area Director at Maslow Academy and Bright Beginnings at Colorado Outdoors, expressed the importance of data for child care efforts in Montrose, “And if you track back a little bit, we were kind of hitting the wall here and there with some of the county commissioners and things that I was asking for my personal [child care] site. What it boiled down to is they needed the data. And I think you said that the only way we’re gonna move a needle is by getting some data. They can listen to us all day. But that was kind of the turning point.”

BACKGROUND

The more data that a community had available to inform their work, the more advantageous it was. La Plata County's Early Childcare Strategic Investment Plan was set in motion before the lodging tax measure was on the ballot, and it was finalized soon after the measure's passage. Of the three communities, La Plata County is arguably best positioned to navigate decision making around lodging tax allocation. The City of Montrose referenced the significance of having a child care needs assessment as a catalyst for their growing community focus on child care. Grand County is just beginning its work on a formal child care needs assessment, and they wished they had had it before they got started.

According to Ed Moyer, Grand County Manager, a needs assessment “*didn’t have to happen prior to the campaign... but that would have been really good information to have going into the process. I think we all know the issues right, but to have the specific data and to specify the issue for all the public... that information would have been powerful.*”



Focus On Residents Over Visitors

Across communities, several stakeholders expressed an ambivalence about promoting tourism. They recognized that tourism is a vital part of the local economy and yet questioned whether more resources should go toward marketing. They drew a connection between an influx of visitors since 2020 and pressures around housing availability and cost of living. They had no hesitancy about shifting funding from tourism promotion to other community priorities and no concerns about discouraging visitors through increased costs related to their travel.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

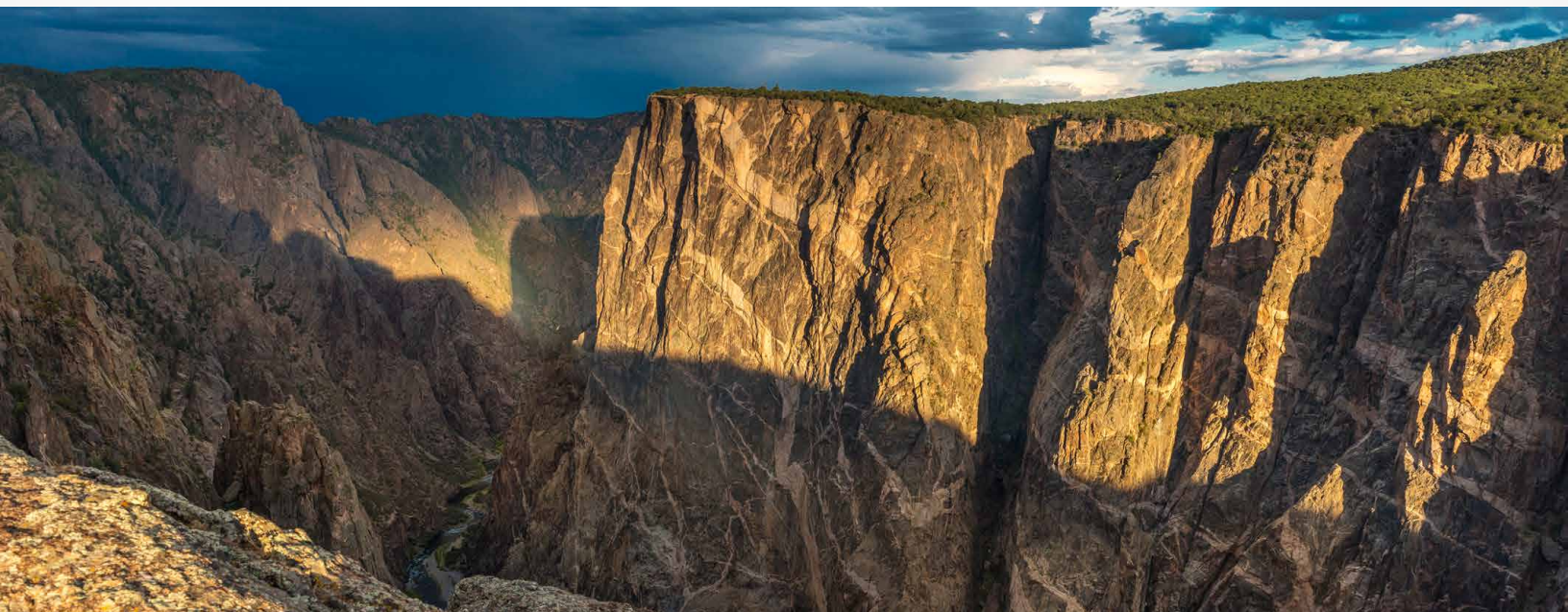
In addition to facilitating factors present within communities, all three pursued external support in different forms.



Informal and Formal Networks

Interviewees noted the importance of their networks as they pursued their approach to passing the lodging tax. Early Childhood Council leaders turned to other Council leaders. City managers turned to other city managers. County commissioners turned to other county commissioners. They wanted to understand how the process worked in those communities, what data was compelling, and any ballot measure language or campaign messaging that could be transferable.

In addition to working directly with peers, several leaders referenced state-level organizations that were helpful. For the two counties—Grand and La Plata—Colorado Counties Inc. (CCI) offered information about how to leverage the lodging tax for community priorities following the passage of HB22-1117, legislation that enabled expanded use of lodging tax revenue. EPIC (Executives Partnering to Invest in Children) was mentioned as a resource in framing early childhood issues for the business community and regarding potential financial models to better meet the full extent of early childhood needs. Finally, Buell’s *Supporting Families, Children, and the Caregiving Workforce: A Local Financing Toolkit for Colorado (Local Financing Toolkit)*, as well as related webinars, were cited by organizations who were previous or current grantees as helpful guides.



HELPFUL RESOURCES



Expert Consultants

None of the communities hired consultants explicitly to help pass the lodging tax; however, many mentioned engagement of consultants for projects that contributed to their readiness. Efforts that engaged external consultants included:



Needs assessments:

Each community mentioned some level of work within 2–3 years of the lodging tax to assess community needs and set priorities. La Plata County and City of Montrose both did a focused assessment on child care, while Grand County is planning to conduct an assessment in the near future. They relied on consultants to support community efforts to understand and explain gaps in child care and how those needs affected families, businesses, and the local economy. For example, City of Montrose engaged Root Policy Research to complete this assessment in 2021, which multiple stakeholders referenced as an important milestone on the path to a successful lodging tax.



Polling:

All the communities mentioned some level of polling that informed their decision to move forward, often integrated into routine polling or surveying cycles conducted by city or county government. Grand County, for example, hired the firm Public Alignment to develop informational pieces and complete a public survey prior to the Board of County Commissioners certifying the ballot.



Coalition capacity-building:

In only one community did stakeholders mention consultant engagement related to coalition-building. In the case of La Plata County, The Good Food Collective had already engaged Advocacy Rising to build the capacity of its food equity coalition. As The Good Food Collective was invited into the lodging tax campaign process, the consulting partner supported their strategy around earned media, messaging, and stakeholder messengers.

Katy Hale, Executive Director of Grand Beginnings, reflected on why they did not engage consultants specifically to support getting the lodging tax passed: “Again, the Commissioners were like, we’re doing this. And I was like, okay, I’ll help you do this. And that was the same with other community partners I know, like Grand Foundation...other big community stakeholders were like, ‘All right, let’s try to figure it out,’ and we just kind of DIYed, it honestly. There wasn’t really anybody else. And it worked. I guess if it hadn’t, we probably would have gone back to the drawing board...”

HELPFUL RESOURCES



Grant Funding

In all communities, nonprofit organizations played a role in educating elected officials and the public about issues on the ballot, often serving as active collaborators and in some cases, supporting campaign activities. These organizations operate with an array of philanthropic support from public sources, private grants, and individual giving to name a few. In most cases, these groups did not fundraise explicitly for lodging tax-related activities.

La Plata County was the only community of the three that secured outside grant funding to support its effort. Sources included:



The Buell Foundation: Funds supported both efforts to inform the lodging tax as well as the broader development of the La Plata County Early Childcare Strategic Investment Plan. Specifically, it helped create program and cost models; compiled related funding sources at the local and state level; created a community outreach strategy; built a webpage; and printed the plan. Heather Hawk, Executive Director of the Early Childhood Council of La Plata County explained that when she and her colleague with the Regional Housing Authority started talking with the County about a potential lodging tax, they needed outside support. She said, “So our organization and the RHA didn’t really have capacity or resources to take on something like this

without additional financial support. Most of our funds are really restricted because we have State contracts to deliver on the wildly important goals of the Department of Early Childhood. And so we don’t have a lot of unrestricted funds to do this kind of advocacy work.”

Colorado Department of Local Affairs Rural Economic

Development Initiative (REDI): Funds supported the development of the Early Childcare Strategic Investment Plan, namely by hiring a consultant and for an extensive community engagement strategy to inform the development of the plan.



COLORADO
Department of Local Affairs



Healthier Colorado: A small grant went to Good Food Collective for campaign mailers for county residents.

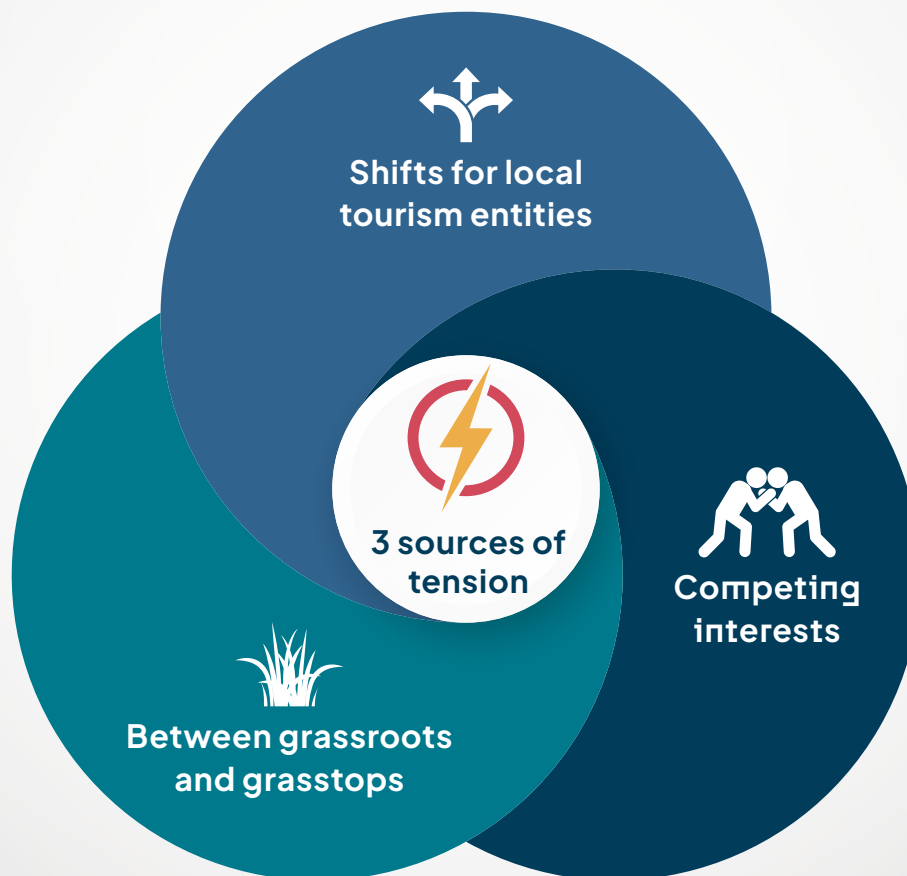
COMMON LESSONS

Limited Coalition Building

As noted, lodging tax measures were initiated in each case by elected officials. They were in the position of inviting community-based organizations into the process after it was already underway. While each of the communities shared a general consensus that child care is an important community need, there were varied levels of existing coordinated advocacy for child care. Buell's Local Financing Toolkit outlines the ways in which a formalized leadership group can offer a helpful foundation to explore and guide local financing efforts. Absent this in the three communities, stakeholders noted limited or uncoordinated campaign efforts. Now as they enter implementation, they feel the lack of an existing group to shepherd the most impactful use of funds.

Navigating Tensions

Child care was widely accepted as a priority community need, and a suitable allocation for lodging tax support. The tensions present within communities followed **three general categories**:



COMMON LESSONS



Shifts for local tourism entities:

Until 2022, county lodging taxes could only be used to promote tourism and visitor experience. In each case, tourism offices and/or business leaders were involved in an exploration of potential impacts of shifts in the lodging tax. For Grand and La Plata, the tourism entities experienced a net loss in marketing funds. However, the tourism industry feels the same pressures as the rest of the community, with businesses needing affordable housing and child care to attract and retain its workforce. It was less a negotiation of whether to move forward, and instead a matter of percentage allocation. Gaylene Ore, Executive Director of Grand County Colorado Tourism Board, shared, “Right off the bat when we first started talking...we as a board, were in support of a certain percentage going to child care because we understood that people could come back into to the workforce, which we need.”



Competing interests:

Stakeholders shared that there was some level of tension present, particularly in determining allocations of lodging tax funding across different interests. In every case, child care and housing were on the table. Grand County and the City of Montrose allowed for additional interests to be funded. For Grand County, the measure maintained notable flexibility with up to 20% of funds to be allocated to either tourism or community priorities annually. And within the fixed 30% assigned to community priorities, the allocation for housing, child care, and enhancing visitor experience will be determined annually. Groups speculate that the tensions between interests will intensify as they shift into implementation. Moyer explained the Board of County Commissioners will ultimately approve annual budgeting, along with programs and projects they are looking at for the subsequent budget year. He shared, “...it’s gonna be tough. There will be feelings hurt. There will be tears.”



Between grassroots and grasstops:

The tension between institutional leaders and community residents varied across communities. In the case of Grand County, county-hosted community meetings created the primary venue for discussion. La Plata County was the only community that had a community resident group engaged in the campaign process, organizing testimony for elected officials at public hearings, and canvassing at community events. It is also the only community where stakeholders noted tensions between the community resident group and the other involved nonprofits. This relates to how the different organizations view the role of residents in the process and the perceived importance for the community resident group to “have a seat at the table” now that the measure has passed.

COMMON LESSONS



Drinking From a Firehose

Almost everyone interviewed reflected on how much they felt they needed to learn in a short amount of time. City and county staff were recognized as essential players in building out timelines for all the necessary steps for the measure to make it on the ballot. They helped navigate required filings and legal language. Early childhood nonprofits noted the level of effort to build a story with compelling data. Some were thrust into leading on campaign strategy for the first time given limitations of governmental and quasi-governmental groups to engage in that way.



The Message is Economic Prosperity

There was no doubt among those interviewed that the most compelling message for the broad community was that of economic prosperity. Leaders expressed that even though children's issues can face generally less resistance on the ballot, the way to build wide support is to show relevance to all community members. Messaging focused on the need for child care so that parents can go to work, and on the idea that a steady workforce is needed for community members to access the amenities they rely on.

Simmons shared her approach, "It's not just 'I retired here and I don't know why I need to worry about supporting the child care center.' Well, I'll tell you how, because you go to the doctors here, and that nurse and that receptionist, and that doctor. They all need care, and that was really brought to light from Covid. But they all need care, and so you won't get your doctor service and your health care, and you won't get your grocery store person to bag your groceries. You won't get your Uber driver to come pick you up..."



Child Care One of Many Needs

All the lodging tax measures support more than one interest. City and county officials strongly agreed that they have a role to play in addressing child care needs. However, they conveyed a similar sense of responsibility for a range of community priorities, including housing and transportation. These issues create a similar bind for individual families and employers. In the case of La Plata County in particular, an intentional partnership between housing leaders and early childhood leaders facilitated the inclusion of child care on the ballot measure.

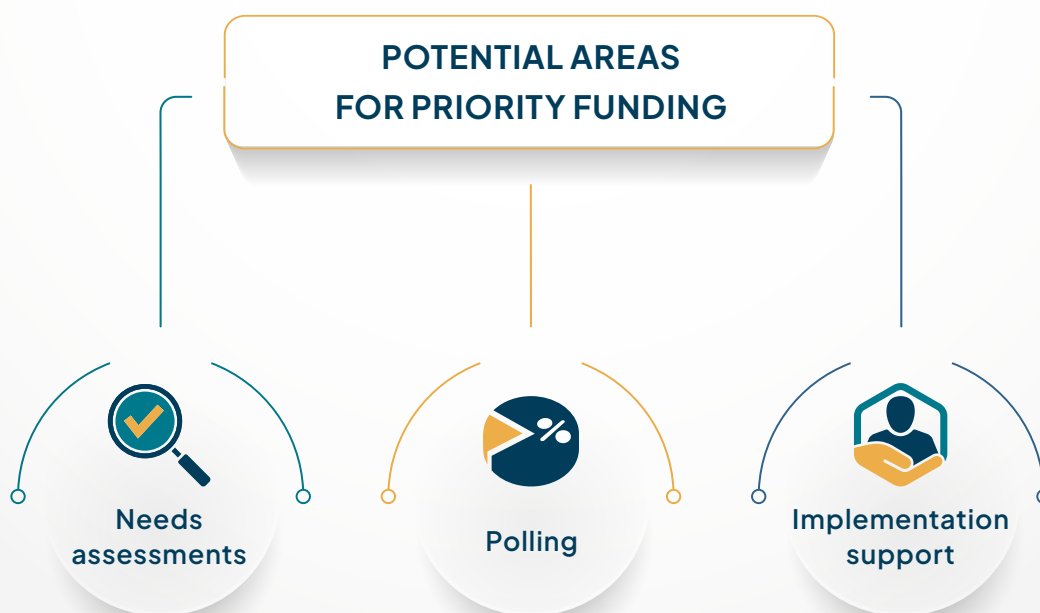
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SUPPORT

As communities across the country face uncertainty related to new and anticipated cuts to long-standing federal funding sources and financial assistance programs, funders are positioned to consider creative ways to meet the moment. Support for local financing models will allow more communities the resources to respond more intentionally and consistently to their priority needs. Moreover, locally generated funds can leverage private or community foundation investments in a host of interconnected issues, including housing and child care, to create more comprehensive solutions. Support for local financing offers funders the rare potential of generating a financial return on investment.

Stakeholders were asked to reflect on what might have made their experience go more smoothly, even though they found success. They were encouraged to reflect on what might be helpful to them as they move into their implementation phase and were invited to reflect on what might facilitate other communities' pursuit of local financing. The following section compiles a range of ideas that funders could adopt to support communities in their efforts to plan for, campaign for, and execute their local financing strategies.

Funding

The three communities agreed that funding could be helpful in navigating the many steps in pursuit of local financing. Being ready for grant funding, having the time to apply for it, and knowing how to best leverage it all requires a certain level of capacity. In communities like La Plata County, nonprofit leaders at the Early Childhood Council and La Plata Economic Development Alliance had experience and relationships with prospective funders, and they were able to access funds in support of their bigger strategic vision, including the lodging tax effort.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SUPPORT



Needs assessments: Collecting local data to demonstrate need came through as an important step across communities. Recognizing this, Grand County plans to seek funds to help with an assessment that will support lodging tax allocations and development of a broader strategy to address child care needs.



Polling: Each of the three highlighted communities leveraged city and county funding for polling. In communities without access to this resource, funds for polling build understanding around the viability of any local financing measure.



Implementation support: Funds for facilitation and decision-making could help communities design a fair and transparent allocation process. In the case of La Plata County, future grant funding can serve as a catalyst and operational support for the realization of their broader Investment Plan, perhaps to hire a staff person to coordinate the work, or to tackle discrete projects that will help move priorities forward. As Hale shared related to upcoming work in Grand County, “Sometimes just having somebody else repeat your words is a really powerful thing when it comes from a third party. It really is. So [we’re] looking at third-party facilitators to really bring broader stakeholder groups together in a really cohesive and professional way, so that everybody has shared buy-in.”

People underscored the importance of funding that is easy to access, timely, and flexible. This points toward the importance of rolling deadlines, streamlined applications, and limited restrictions that support collaboration and responsiveness. Funders can also encourage the integration of best practices through funding design or requirements, such as integrating community member participation from start to finish. Each of these opportunities could be facilitated by funders moving with the intention of building relationships with priority communities and working alongside community leaders to assess together the way in which available funding could best position the community for success at the ballot.

Capacity Support

In all these rural communities, the people we interviewed juggle multiple responsibilities, yet somehow found ways to make space to maneuver toward a successful ballot measure. Stakeholders named ways in which outside support could be most helpful. In the context of child care, Early Childhood Councils are positioned to play an essential role throughout all stages in a local financing process. Yet they will need meaningful support to ensure that their expertise in early childhood systems building translates to raising public awareness and inviting engagement in the issue across other community priorities and stakeholders. They can maintain a steady foundation of knowledge, relationships, and communication with county or municipal leaders that can be leveraged when timing is right to pursue a ballot measure. Councils are not the only organization that could benefit from capacity-building support, but they can offer a starting point for funders particularly interested in the pursuit of local financing for child care, or for any intersecting issue that affects families with young children.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SUPPORT

According to Hale, “I recognize that I really need to bring in just more capacity. We weren’t exactly as an early childhood council or a nonprofit sitting around twiddling our thumbs beforehand. We were already quite busy. And so, having to strap this on has been a pretty heavy lift. A welcome [one], but a heavy lift. And so there’s been a recognition that we really need to gain some added capacity to do this work.” Communities expressed many potential capacity building opportunities, though a few were commonly cited:



Content expertise: Having access to people who know the ins and outs of the local ballot measure process could have been helpful in building timelines and clear steps for what is necessary for the process to unfold. Early childhood leaders shared that they could use help with collecting and presenting information strategically both to build community awareness and also to inform how funds can best be utilized to address local needs.



Coaching on coalition-building: Stakeholders reflected on how valuable it would be to have someone who could talk with them about their community’s unique political landscape and cast of players and help build a strategy. These community players were thrust together during a specific point in time to support the passage of the lodging tax, but they see that having a more intentional coalition throughout the process could have been beneficial. This would have created a foundation for leveraging each partner’s strengths and financial resources depending on the phase of the work and the legal limitations around lobbying. As they shift to implementation, an established coalition could have clarified next steps to support a transparent and smooth allocation of funds.



Driving the campaign: None of the campaigns was particularly robust in these three communities, in part this was because there was no coordinated opposition, and some believed that remaining “under the radar” was advantageous. In the case of La Plata County, one leader reflected that she wished the campaign was more active. This highlighted a convergence of capacity limitations. For example, two of the driving entities—the Early Childhood Council and the La Plata Economic Development Alliance—were limited in their ability to lobby. The Good Food Collective, which took the lead in this area, was invited to the process late and had not led on political strategy in the past. In this case, a coach could have helped identify opportunities and kept momentum across partners engaged to the greatest degree.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SUPPORT

Access to Information and Examples

Stakeholders interviewed referenced how helpful it was to talk to peers who had done something similar. Beyond this, they wished there was a central place they could go to see examples and find the kinds of help they need. Funders have the unique vantage point of working across communities and having access to thought leaders from city and county government, state-level experts, and even national resource partners. This creates an opportunity and responsibility to harness insights to make valuable information more readily available to communities that need it. Some areas of greatest interest included:



Messaging:

Even though there was general agreement about focusing on the economy, people still wanted examples they could turn to for reports and campaign materials for reference. People are also looking for ways to communicate the important yet limited potential of the lodging tax in the broader context of child care needs. They are looking for how other communities have conveyed that this funding will bolster existing resources but cannot supplant them. The tax contributes to meeting the need, but the tax alone cannot solve it.



Creation of tailored toolkits:

Buell's Local Financing Toolkit is found to be helpful, and some people wanted more. They wondered if there could be a specific toolkit for lodging tax reallocation that includes detailed timelines and examples from other communities related to data they used and public education and campaign materials.



Determining where to invest:

These three communities have taken a brief pause to celebrate the passage of their ballot measures and now, as their funds are building, they are turning to how allocation decisions will be made. La Plata County leads the group with its Early Childcare Strategic Investment Plan, although exactly how that will inform lodging tax decisions remains to be seen. Other communities recognize that having a clear picture of overarching strategies to address needs and ideas for how those will be prioritized and funded could facilitate a smooth implementation process. It would be helpful to see models of investment plans, and to have a centralized place for information on available grants and other financing mechanisms.



What happens next?

Stakeholders shared their felt sense that they are among an early wave of communities who are taking local financing strategies to the ballot. They'd like to know what has happened next for some of the earliest communities to pursue local financing for child care, and they recognize that these stories are still unfolding. They would appreciate the documentation of lessons from pioneers in this area to be shared so that new communities need not face uncertainty at each step of the process or repeat missteps.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SUPPORT

Foundation Leadership

Community leaders see the potential for the Buell Foundation and other foundations in serving a more significant role in this area than offering funding. Funders are seen as having the ability to convene, set an agenda, and organize. Just as communities are encouraged to work across interests for a common purpose, funders should examine ways to bridge across issues to form a collaborative strategy for local financing. Foundation program staff often take up the mantle of collaborating with other funders on particular strategies. Given that the issue of local financing crosses multiple strategies (e.g., child care, housing, transportation, and fire protection/emergency preparedness), partnerships could be facilitated by foundation executives becoming more actively involved in establishing the intent to work together.

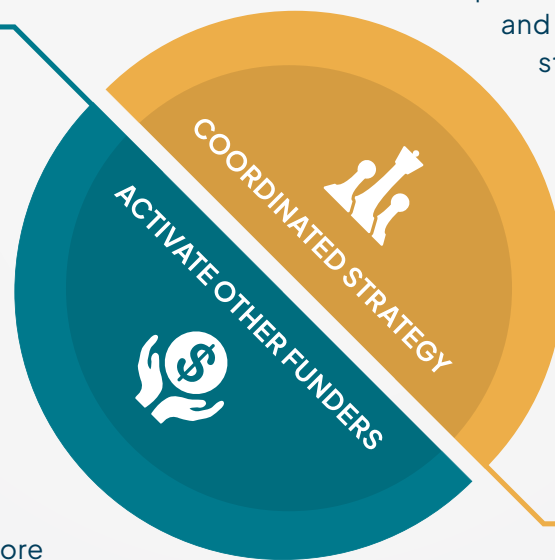
Develop a coordinated strategy: Funders interested in local financing models can create a coordinated strategy to more effectively share information with prospective communities and drive thoughtful campaigns. Some noted that the lodging tax is “low-hanging fruit,” as there are already many Colorado counties that utilize this tax, which could be increased or reallocated. Moreover, the tax is paid by visitors rather than community residents, which is a much easier sell to voters. Funders could leverage their relationships and influence to advance targeted conversations with communities who are interested and match them with available resources. They could continue

to promote this through some of the peer and leadership groups named in stakeholder interviews, such as Early Childhood Councils, community foundations, Colorado Counties Inc., and even the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program alumni network.

Activate other funders:

Early childhood leaders lamented the shift of several Colorado-based philanthropic organizations away from early childhood grantmaking. Given this reality, they reflected that securing local funding is even more

important to improving access to child care. The Buell Foundation can serve a role of organizing the funding community to promote local ballot measure work. As communities look to build their local campaigns, funders like Buell could build a campaign for more philanthropic engagement in this type of work. Stakeholders recommend that funders describe the full picture to their funder peers about how child care relates to their varied interests. They can promote economic development as a compelling connection point that ties related issues like child care and housing. Funders may need education in how they can be involved in promoting local financing strategies and in understanding how it leverages their other investments in individual nonprofits.



CONCLUSION

Across Colorado, communities are grappling with how to meet child care needs in a way that supports families with young children, care providers, and employer workforce needs. Local financing, including the lodging tax, offers one way that local communities can create a stable resource to address local child care priorities. As the communities outlined in this report showcase, counties and municipalities hold the initiative and resolve to advance local financing opportunities. The funding community has the potential to come forward in more significant and strategic ways to encourage and strengthen other communities as they embark on efforts to raise community awareness, build thoughtful strategy, and secure local funding sources to realize priority goals.



APPENDIX

Community Overviews

GRAND COUNTY

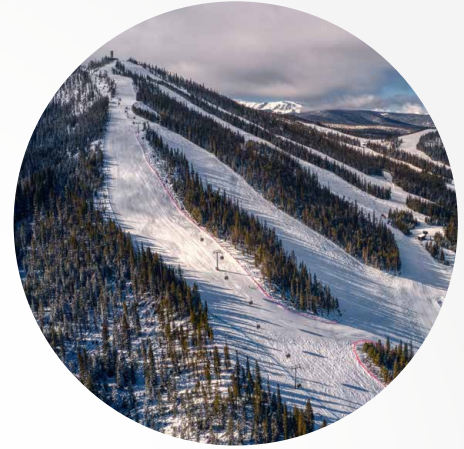
Community:

- Total population (2022): 15,748 [2024 Kids Count]
- Children ages 5 and under (2022): 614
- Rural, major towns including Winter Park, Granby, Grand Lake, Kremmling

Year tax established/reauthorized and vote: 2024

Tax type: lodging tax

- The existing lodging tax was set at 1.8%; voters approved a new tax rate of 2%, excluding the Town of Winter Park, which maintains its own municipal lodging tax.
- No less than 50% will continue marketing local tourism. No less than 30% will support other uses, such as housing, child care, and other services to enhance visitor experiences. About 20% will remain flexible to address specific needs each year.



Approximate revenue generated annually:

- Based on 2023 data, about \$2.25 million will be raised annually. Approximately \$675,000 will be available to community priority needs.

How revenue is allocated or spent:

- Determined annually. A community advisory group will be formed through the Grand Foundation, a local community foundation, to make recommendations to the Grand Board of County Commissioners about annual use of funds.

Governance:

- Grand County is the taxing entity and the authority ultimately responsible for funding allocation decisions.

Origin story and champions:

- In 2023, county commissioners updated strategic priorities, and child care was one. (Other priorities include affordable housing and transportation.)
- County representatives and staff began the process in January 2024 to host community meetings, resulting in approved language in June 2024.
- Grand Beginnings, the Early Childhood Council, is a recognized leader in telling the story of child care needs in the region, which supported the success of the campaign.

Stakeholders interviewed:

- **Katy Hale**, Executive Director, Grand Beginnings
- **Megan Ledin**, Executive Director, Grand Foundation
- **Ed Moyer**, County Manager, Grand County
- **Gaylene Ore**, Executive Director, Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

APPENDIX

LA PLATA COUNTY

Community:

- Total population (2022): 56,557 [2024 Kids Count]
- Children ages 5 and under (2022): 2,214
- Rural, major towns including Durango, Bayfield, Ignacio

Year tax established/reauthorized and vote: 2024

Tax type: Lodging Tax

- The existing lodging tax of 2% was reallocated, excluding the City of Durango (which maintains its own municipal lodging tax).
- 30% will continue marketing local tourism. 70% will be used for operating and capital expenditures to acquire, construct, maintain, enhance, renovate, relocate, improve, promote, support, finance, and fund housing and child care for workers.



Approximate revenue generated annually:

- Approximately \$1 million will be raised annually. \$700,000 will go toward housing and child care efforts.

How revenue is allocated or spent:

- Determined annually. The County developed a request for proposals for an entity to accept grant applications and make recommendations about available funding. Recommendations will go to the County Commissioners for final approval.

Governance:

- La Plata County is the taxing entity and the authority ultimately responsible for funding allocation decisions.

Origin story and champions:

- Routine polling conducted by the county since 2022 showed strong support for local financing through lodging tax reallocation.
- County Commissioners decided to put forward the ballot measure, initially planning to pursue it for housing and then integrating child care as the issues “go hand in hand.”
- At the time this was being contemplated, the local tourism group overseeing current lodgers’ tax funds was experiencing some controversy and change. This may have equated to lower than normal confidence in the group and may have meant reduced resistance to shifting funds from marketing and destination management to childcare and housing.
- A Regional Housing Alliance (RHA) became reinvigorated in 2021 due to the crises in housing and individual members contributed to support for the vote.

APPENDIX

- La Plata Economic Development Alliance, in partnership with the Early Childhood Council of La Plata County, secured funding in summer 2024 to develop an Early Child Care Strategic Investment Plan intended to outline investment vehicles to comprehensively overcome barriers to child care. These entities informed and supported the lodging tax reallocation effort, which will contribute to plan goals.
- The Good Food Collective, a regional advocate for a thriving food system, became engaged in child care given the priorities identified by community members in the La Plata Food Equity Coalition. Their ties to Spanish-speaking community members led to powerful community input about the need for the reallocation.

Stakeholders interviewed:

- **Tiffany Chacon**, *Early Childhood Project Manager*, Good Food Collective
- **Heather Hawk**, *Executive Director*, Early Childhood Council of La Plata County
- **Cass Walker Harvey**, *Founder*, CWH Consulting LLC
- **Kyle Huelsman**, *Managing Director*, Advocacy Rising
- **Rachel Landis**, *Director*, Good Food Collective
- **Marsha Porter-Norton**, *County Commissioner*, La Plata County
- **Sarah Tober**, *Executive Director*, La Plata Economic Development Alliance



APPENDIX

CITY OF MONTROSE

Community:

- Total population (2023): 21,333 [U.S. Census Bureau]
- Children under age 5 (2022): 1,259 [U.S. Census Bureau reports 5.9% under age 5]
- Rural

Year tax established/reauthorized and vote: 2024

Tax type: lodging tax

- The existing lodging tax of .9% was increased to 6%.
- Before the measure passed, Montrose had the lowest lodging tax rate among surveyed communities. The average tax statewide is 6.7%.
- The tax will be assigned to multiple uses, including: housing (33%), street maintenance (25%), tourism (20%), child care (17%), and public transit (5%).

Approximate revenue generated annually:

- Conservative estimates show approximately \$158,000 available to child care annually.

How revenue is allocated or spent:

- Categorical allocations are determined through ballot language. The process for specific use of child care funds is yet to be determined. City staff will be discussing with internal staff and external stakeholders in the coming months to identify a process.

Governance:

- The City of Montrose is the taxing entity and the authority ultimately responsible for funding allocation decisions.

Origin story and champions:

- Stakeholders discussed long-standing advocacy for early childhood, citing a 2015 committee formed with Rural Philanthropy Days funding to explore how child care is integral to community and economic development. Additionally, Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families (the regional Early Childhood Council) and the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance commissioned a 2021 child care needs assessment for Montrose (City and County). The report quantified the need and impact of child care gaps, extrapolating data on the economic impact of child care from the state to the local level.
- The needs assessment contributed to the community's selection by Unify America to participate in a year-long community engagement process in 2023 designed to identify solutions to priority needs. Unify Montrose increased broad community awareness of the need for child care and established an implementation team. The implementation team is an ongoing group, now housed at Unify Montrose, a new 501(c)(3) and maintains a standing Early Childhood Committee that can support implementation of community priorities.



APPENDIX

- City Council and City staff initiated the move to put the lodging tax on the ballot, leveraging community awareness and receptivity.
- The allocation breakdowns were discussed internally and workshopped with the City Council and were prioritized based on what we were hearing from the community through the Montrose Community Survey, Montrose Housing Needs Assessment, and Montrose County Child Care Survey.
- The city held open houses to inform community members about the lodging tax, which were minimally attended. There was no organized opposition.

Stakeholders interviewed:

- **Cathy Barber**, *Strong Start Program Coordinator*, Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families
- **Jace Hochwalt**, *Community Development Director*, City of Montrose
- **Kathlene Merritt**, *Executive Director*, Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families
- **Chris Ottiger**, *Community Development Specialist*, City of Montrose
- **Chrissy Simmons**, *Founder*, Bloom Educational Consulting and Area Director at Maslow Academy and Bright Beginnings at Colorado Outdoors

