

# 2025



# ANNUAL REPORT



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# Moving Forward in Partnership -

Opening statement from Michele Shimomura,  
*President & Executive Director*



Over the past year, Trailhead Institute has advanced its mission of empowering Colorado communities to lead their own paths to better health. As a trusted partner, we work to reduce administrative burdens, strengthen capacity, and support community-driven solutions across the state. Our focus remains anchored in three core drivers: building capacity, advancing justice, and fostering collaboration.

During 2025, there have been many changes in the field of public health, especially with our governmental partners, and in the political landscape. Throughout this year, we have kept our commitment to stand firm and live our organizational values: collaboration, curiosity, inclusion, innovation, and reflection. This report shows the progress we've made, the challenges we've navigated, and the pathway ahead as we engage with partners, funders, and communities.



*Michele Shimomura presents to Trailhead staff at the strategic planning retreat.  
Photo credit: Taruni Danti*

As we move into 2026, Trailhead will continue to stay rooted to the truth that meaningful and lasting change happens when communities hold the decision-making power, and when administrative, operational, and philanthropic systems support these local solutions.

Trailhead looks forward to deepening relationships with our partners and extending our reach to new individuals and organizations. In 2026, we are looking for innovative ways of sharing our learned experiences to help others with practices such as regenerative hiring, coaching, and financial and organizational capacity building. Trailhead exists to help others thrive.

We are especially grateful to our community-based partners, philanthropic and governmental funders, and the committed Trailhead team whose ingenuity and dedication drive the work forward.





# Introduction

Trailhead Institute's 2025-2026 Annual Report details how the organization works to advance innovation and collaboration in public and environmental health. Trailhead helps communities lead solutions to better health outcomes by:



easing the administrative burden on community-based organizations and initiatives through fiscal sponsorship and operational support,



ensuring resources reach the communities that need them most, and



leading programs that address unmet public health needs.



# Our Values

Trailhead's values of collaboration, curiosity, inclusion, innovation, and reflection lay the foundation for all that the organization does. These values inform Trailhead's operational design and decision-making to create an organization that supports the wellbeing of its team members and equitably serves partners to improve the health of communities across Colorado.

## Collaboration

Trailhead values the practice of listening and evolving together to support each other in achieving shared outcomes that lead to healthier communities. Through partnerships and teamwork, team members honor individual strengths and collective wisdom to make meaningful change guided by many voices. Trailhead centers those who have been historically excluded from partnerships and conversations in public health.

## Curiosity

Trailhead values the ongoing practice of asking questions and listening with open minds and hearts. The organization takes a genuine interest in the 'why?', in root causes, and in understanding the experiences of others. Team members maintain a beginner's mind and commit to lifelong learning and unlearning.

## Inclusion

Trailhead commits to the intentional act of creating a workplace where people feel welcome to come as they are. Trailhead recognizes that team members are interdependent and all play a role in supporting each other's value, dignity, and uniqueness. Team members create a thriving workplace made stronger by varying perspectives and thoughtful decision-making.

## Innovation

Trailhead values fresh ideas that can impact healthy communities. Team members examine multiple perspectives and test new solutions and recommendations. The organization is open to new methods, approaches, and initiatives when taking mission-relevant risks. Trailhead elevates the optimism of trying new things and thinking creatively.

## Reflection

Team members commit to becoming more self-aware, recognizing their role in groups, teams, organizations, and systems. Trailhead learns from the past, stays accountable to present impacts, and designs and redesigns a dynamic future based on both experience and possibility. Team members ask questions about their perspective, investigate their own assumptions, and continue learning and evolving.



A group of hikers with backpacks walking on a wooden trail through a forest. The hikers are seen from behind, moving away from the camera. The trail is made of wooden planks and is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The scene is bright and sunny.

## **Strengthening Community-Led Solutions for Better Health**

Behind every healthy community is a network of people and organizations working together at every level of public health. However, the public health system is complex. Prevention and intervention efforts work best when communities — especially those who are underserved, excluded, or marginalized — lead the way. These communities thrive when supported by government agencies, healthcare systems, researchers, policymakers, and funders who share a commitment to community-led approaches.

Currently, achieving true community leadership in public health is challenging. Traditional systems often hold power and resources within institutions rather than within communities. It takes time, trust, strong relationships, and coordination to shift decision-making, funding, and resources to the people most affected by health inequities.

As a non-profit public health institute, we strengthen Colorado's public health system by creating programs, partnerships, and supports that address unmet needs and help community-led efforts launch and succeed. Trailhead serves as a strategic partner to organizations across the state, sharing knowledge, reducing administrative barriers, and connecting partners with the resources and infrastructure needed to improve health outcomes with communities at the forefront of solutions.



# Trailhead Operations

## Building an organization that puts people first

Operations is the backbone of Trailhead, ensuring that people, systems, and strategies are aligned for collective success. Rooted in a people-first approach, the Operations Team designs and maintains the infrastructure that allows Trailhead's mission to thrive.

The team believes that when people are supported, engaged, and empowered, the whole organization benefits. From hiring and offboarding to benefits, work culture, and internal systems, the Operations Team models regenerative and human-centered practices that prioritize both individual and organizational well-being.

With expertise in coaching, regenerative hiring, systems and process design, strategic planning, and organizational development, the Operations Team ensures Trailhead remains a place where innovation and care coexist.



*Trailhead staff gather in Wheat Ridge, Colorado for a strategic planning retreat.  
Photo credit: Taruni Donti*

## Our core functions reflect this commitment:



*Trailhead's Accounting Manager, Julie Bañuelos, helps ensure Trailhead maintains sound financial stewardship with two decades of accounting, operations, and education experience.  
Photo credit: Taruni Donti*

### Finance

Stewards Trailhead's resources with integrity and transparency to sustain long-term impact.

### Communications

Shares Trailhead's mission, vision, values, and impact through clear, consistent, and authentic communication.

### People and Culture

Design regenerative hiring and offboarding experiences, equitable HR practices, and benefits that recognize the interconnected wellness of individuals and the organization.

### Systems and Operations

Develop cohesive, easy-to-navigate systems and processes that make Trailhead's internal operations flow efficiently and collaboratively.

### Internal Learning and Evaluation

Gather and apply staff feedback to continuously evolve our practices and strengthen the employee experience.

Together, these functions form the operational ecosystem that supports every Trailhead program, project, and partnership—so that all who work with or at Trailhead can thrive.



## 2025 Highlights

- **Completing Trailhead's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan**

Trailhead completed a five-year strategic plan that defines the organization's strengths as a public health partner and outlines the operational capacity needed to achieve its mission. The plan spans five years, and identifies five main goals:

**1.** Clearly define, show, and evaluate Trailhead's distinct role and value within Colorado's public health ecosystem and for its partners.

**2.** Explore learning systems within Trailhead and with partners to advance equity, collaboration, and consistent practices.

**3.** Strengthen and protect the public health system by building capacity for advocacy, policy, and lobbying.

**4.** Develop and implement a clear decision-making framework, rooted in the Theory of Change, to guide Trailhead's engagement in public health initiatives and partnerships.

**5.** Ensure supports for a rooted, strong, and stable organization.

- **Strengthening Trailhead's Messaging**

Trailhead developed a new messaging framework to clearly communicate how the organization uses its strengths to serve key partners and support Colorado's public health system. The framework builds on brand and strategic planning efforts and will guide marketing strategies in 2026.

- **Supporting Workplaces That Center People**

Trailhead's commitment to people-centered innovation is reflected in ***Reimagining the Job Search: Regenerative Approaches for Job-Seekers and Employers***, which premiered at *Public Health in the Rockies* in September. The initiative offers paid capacity-building support for public health, community-based organizations, and for-profit businesses that advance social good. Individuals seeking meaningful work and organizations striving to hire with equity and integrity can access the service. The approach is grounded in regenerative leadership and shared accountability to help people and organizations thrive together.

Trailhead welcomes partnerships in 2026 with agencies, organizations, and businesses that want to apply regenerative principles to their employment and organizational practices. This work continues to shape environments that value connection, integrity, and collective growth.

Support includes:

- **Systems Change and Policy Influence:** Trailhead's work contributes to lasting change, policy shifts, and sustainable practices.
- **Capacity Building:** The initiative provides training, technical assistance, or leadership development to strengthen partners' skills and capacity.
- **Stories and Testimonials:** Partner narratives or quotes help garner attention and funding and illustrate real-world impact.



## Key Strategies in Action



### Launching Services to Develop Organizations and Center People in Leadership and Sustainable Systems

#### Creating a clear menu of services offered by Trailhead

Trailhead's leadership and organizational development services are designed to help mission-driven teams thrive. Grounded in equity, collaboration, and reflection, Trailhead's offerings build the capacity of leaders and organizations to communicate clearly, navigate complex challenges, and create systems that support wellbeing.

Whether through individual or team coaching, leadership training, regenerative hiring, or process improvement, Trailhead helps nonprofits and public health departments strengthen trust, align with their values, and create lasting impact. Trailhead will share a full list of services in 2026.



*Trailhead's Senior Director of Operations, Lisa Olcese, leads the creation of Trailhead's services that support public health organizations in designing people-centered workplaces.  
Photo credit: Rachel Heacox Photography*



### Increasing Financial Transparency for Community Partners

#### Building capacity for community-based initiatives to launch and scale

Trailhead partnered with [ImpactGraph](#), a platform that helps fiscal sponsors share real-time financial information with Administrative Partners. Partners can submit bills, use credit cards, and track spending directly in the system. This reduces the back and forth of emails, freeing up time for partners to focus on their programming and for Trailhead's finance team to analyze financial information. Partners can see their financial reports on demand, allowing them to make informed decisions without having to wait for monthly updates.

Trailhead has the extraordinary opportunity to work alongside the ImpactGraph product team to share feedback and shape the platform's features, making it more helpful for everyone who uses it.


Early feedback from partners has been very positive. Trailhead is excited to continue rolling out the platform to bring more transparency and support to community partners as they grow their impact in Colorado.

## How to Get Involved

Partner with Trailhead: Trailhead seeks partners who want to bring regenerative practices into their hiring and organizational systems and build workplaces grounded in connection, integrity, and collective growth. If you would like support, email [info@trailhead.institute](mailto:info@trailhead.institute).



# Trailhead Programs



Tara Hardy leads the Programs at Trailhead, bringing over 20 years of public health experience to her role as Senior Director of Programs.

Photo Credit: Rachel Heacox Photography

Trailhead strengthens Colorado's public health system by developing and implementing programs that meet unmet public health needs, connect communities and systems, and support sustainable solutions across Colorado. The organization has created and supported successful programs across all 64 Colorado counties and across the country. Each program supports partners to use their unique strengths and fulfill the health priorities of their community.

The programs at Trailhead include the Administrative Partnership Program, Colorado Cancer Coalition, Regional Health Connector Program, Youth Sexual Health Program, and Workforce Programs & Initiatives.

## Administrative Partnership Program



Juan Carlos Machuca supports Trailhead's Administrative Partners as a Grants and Contracts Accountant, ensuring they have a clear understanding of their financial information.

Photo credit: Taruni Danti

Many community-based initiatives struggle to focus on their impact because managing finances, grants, contracts, and staff is complex and time-consuming. Trailhead's [Administrative Partnership Program](#) (APP) helps manage the challenges of nonprofit work by supporting individuals, organizations, and collaboratives with essential administrative functions, building the capacity of community leaders to focus on serving their communities.

Through APP, Trailhead provides

- comprehensive financial, grant, and contract management,
- compliance oversight, and
- operational support.

This allows partners to launch and grow community-led solutions — without administrative barriers.

This approach also helps community-based organizations compete for major grant funding, which often goes to larger institutions with more staff and operational infrastructure. By reducing administrative barriers and offering hands-on support, Trailhead ensures partners have the resources they need to implement innovative, community-led programs that meet local needs.



## 2025 Highlights

- **Partnership Growth**

APP brought on 13 partners, now serving over 50 community-based partners.

- **Investing in New Technology to Build Capacity**

The program continues to utilize new technologies, such as Impact Graph, to increase financial transparency for APP partners.

- **Celebrating Program Impact**

APP launched new storytelling to highlight partners, their impact, and pathways within fiscal sponsorship.

- **Collaborating Across Projects**

New cross-project collaborations formed among partners addressing food security in Colorado, including the [Provecho Collective](#), [Jefferson County Food Policy Council](#), and [Food Security Network](#). Collaborations also formed between projects and Trailhead programs, such as CHARGE for Positive Youth Development and the Youth Sexual Health Program.

## Key Strategy in Action



### **Providing Strategic Partnership**

#### **Building capacity for community-based initiatives to launch and scale**

Administrative demands can be draining for aspiring nonprofits and philanthropic endeavors, especially after a full day of program planning, development, and implementation. For those entities and individuals who would seek to solely focus on their mission, Trailhead handles those administrative demands through critical operational and financial support such as contracting, accounting, strategic and financial planning, and thought partnership.

## How to Get Involved

Become an Administrative Partner by visiting [Trailhead's website](#) to watch the pre-screening webinar and submit your application!



# Colorado Cancer Coalition

The Colorado Cancer Coalition (CCC) is a statewide collaborative working to eliminate the burden of cancer in Colorado. CCC helps Colorado's oncology community prevent cancer, detect cancer early, and enhance quality of life for survivors and their caregivers. The network does this by disseminating education, resources, and connecting patients and their caregivers to opportunities to advocate for better cancer outcomes across the state.

Trailhead serves as the program office for CCC to build administrative capacity, support fundraising, engage communities, and coordinate with state and national partners.

## 2025 Highlights

- **Expanding Communication and Engagement**

Trailhead provided monthly resources, funding opportunities, and community engagement updates to more than 1,300 subscribers through the monthly CCC newsletter. These updates helped strengthen statewide connections and collaboration across cancer prevention, treatment, and survivorship sectors.

- **Convening Colorado's Cancer Community**

Trailhead convened over 100 participants from across Colorado for the CCC's Annual Symposium. The full-day convening featured 12 sessions and fostered cross-sector learning and collaboration among healthcare providers, public health professionals, researchers, survivors, and advocates.

- **Guiding the 2026–2030 Colorado Cancer Plan**

Trailhead supported the revision of the Colorado Cancer Plan, which will serve as a statewide roadmap for reducing the burden of cancer through coordinated strategies in prevention, early detection, treatment, survivorship, and health equity for the next 5 years.

- **Expanding Access to Cancer Information through Bilingual Webinars**

In 2025, the CCC hosted five webinars offered in both English and Spanish to ensure that more Coloradans could access cancer information and resources. These sessions connected community members, survivors, and healthcare professionals with up-to-date guidance on prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship. By offering content in multiple languages, the CCC reduced barriers to participation, strengthened partnerships with bilingual providers and organizations, and supported more inclusive statewide communication around cancer prevention and care.

- **Celebrating Colorado's Cancer Survivors**

On June 1, 2025, the CCC hosted two Survivors Day events in Colorado Springs and Metro Denver to celebrate and honor cancer survivors, caregivers, and their support networks. These gatherings brought together community members, healthcare providers, and partner organizations to share stories of resilience, connect participants with local resources, and strengthen community among Coloradans affected by cancer. The relationships formed during these events led to continued collaboration and increased community engagement in Southern Colorado, helping expand the CCC's reach.



*Ella Meyer, Program Manager for the Colorado Cancer Coalition, joined Mile High Living to inform Coloradans how they can donate to the Colorado Cancer Fund when they file their taxes.*

*Photo credit: Taruni Donti*



## Key Strategy in Action



### Expanding the CCC's Reach: Launching the Pediatric / AYA Task Force

#### Addressing unmet needs

In 2025, the CCC partnered with the [Colorado Kids Cancer Association](#) and the [Morgan Adams Foundation](#) to launch the [Pediatric and Adolescent and Young Adult \(AYA\) Task Force](#) – a new collaborative effort dedicated to improving the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults with cancer in Colorado.

The Task Force will strengthen communication and coordination among pediatric and AYA cancer stakeholders across the state. Its work focuses on enhancing access to care by addressing geographic disparities, improving psychosocial and survivorship support for patients and families, and identifying unmet needs to guide the development of new programs and initiatives.

The group also aims to raise awareness within the broader coalition about the unique challenges faced by younger patients, advocating for equitable, age-appropriate care and policies that support their treatment, research, and long-term well-being. By collaborating closely with other CCC Task Forces, the Pediatric/AYA Task Force will help create a more cohesive statewide network that better supports Coloradans affected by cancer at every stage of life.

The creation of this Task Force marks an important step toward a more inclusive and connected cancer community in Colorado - one that ensures the voices and needs of young people and their families are represented in statewide cancer prevention and control efforts.

## How to Get Involved

- Donate to the Colorado Cancer Fund during tax season or year-round using [PayPal](#).
- Explore resources in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to help Coloradans find support and services.
- [Subscribe](#) to the CCC newsletter for the latest cancer-related news, resources, and events.
- Follow CCC on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#) for updates, information, and resources.
- [Join a task force](#) and help advance statewide goals in cancer prevention, screening, treatment, and survivorship.
- Contact [CCCInfo@trailhead.institute](mailto:CCCInfo@trailhead.institute) to share your own resources or get in touch.
- In 2026, CCC will open to the public for new members! Stay tuned through CCC's newsletter and social media for more information.



# Regional Health Connector Program

*Jami Hiyakumoto supports the planning and implementation of a statewide learning collaborative focused on cardiovascular disease prevention, detection, and control for the Regional Health Connector Program.*

*Photo credit: Taruni Donti*



Healthcare and service providers are increasingly looking outside their clinics to improve the health of their patients' communities. However, the healthcare system is complex and many Colorado communities are under-resourced. To support a better connected system, the [Regional Health Connector](#) (RHC) Program supports a community-based workforce that connects public health, community-based organizations, and clinics to address health disparities in their region.

Located in each of Colorado's 21 Health Statistic Regions, RHCs convene partners, identify resources, and build relationships to support community-driven solutions so that every community in Colorado can find support for their health needs.

## 2025 Highlights

### • Increasing Community-Clinical Linkages (CCLs)

From January to September of 2025, RHCs made over 4,800 connection points in 21 regions with behavioral health practices and organizations (13%), clinics (16%), community organizations (50%), hospitals (6%), local government agencies and public health (13%), and Regional Accountability Entities (RAEs)(2%).

### • Strengthening Communication and Collaboration

To enhance effective communication between RHCs, [University of Colorado](#) (CU), and [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment](#) (CDPHE), a comprehensive stakeholder communication plan is being developed. The plan will outline clear roles and responsibilities and create consistent feedback loops with RHCs to better navigate the complexities of their work.

### • Identifying Core Competencies

The program is developing core competencies and training plans for RHCs to further guide their work and support their impact in communities.

### • Learning in Collaboration

The Community-Clinical Linkages Learning Collaborative met three times in 2025. This collaborative creates a space where relevant partners, including eight RHCs, learn from each other about how to strengthen CCLs to improve health outcomes. Topics for this year included:

- develop messaging to gain support from different groups to partner on creating CCLs,
- building trust between partners, and



- understanding CCL projects within the learning collaborative to identify areas of alignment, reduce silos and duplication, and maximize impact.
- **Piloting New Partnerships**

Piloting the statewide alignment framework, four RHCs partnered with four organizations to improve cardiovascular health outcomes through sharing information, convening partners, and developing CCLs. The four pilot partnerships are:

- Jamie Rodriguez, serving Adams County in Region 14, and the [Colorado Health Institute](#) (CHI).
- Megan Wise serving Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel counties in Region 10, and [Rocky Mountain Health Plans](#) (RAE).
- Shauna Richardson, serving Cheyenne, Elbert, Kit Carson, and Lincoln counties in Region 5, and Pharmacies.
- Cynthia Keenan serving Boulder and Broomfield counties in Region 16, and [Colorado Community Health Alliance](#) (RAE).

## Key Strategy in Action



### Leveraging Partnerships to Expand Resources and Capacity

#### Directing resources where they are needed most

In 2023, the RHC Program transitioned into a new structure, with CDPHE as the contract monitor, CU as the program evaluator, and Trailhead Institute as the program manager. However, the partnership faced communication and coordination challenges while also needing to continue supporting RHCs across the state who serve as vital connectors between clinical care, public health, and community organizations.

As the program manager, Trailhead helps navigate and strengthen this new collaborative structure. Trailhead is working closely with CDPHE and CU to clarify roles, streamline processes, and establish consistent communication channels that center the needs of RHCs. This includes developing shared tools and feedback loops to ensure that evaluation data and program management inform one another in real time. Through these coordinated efforts, CDPHE, CU, and Trailhead are working to become more aligned and responsive, resulting in stronger and more consistent support for the RHC network.

In parallel, Trailhead led an intentional effort to elevate the visibility and understanding of the RHC role through storytelling. Because data alone cannot fully convey the program's impact, Trailhead partnered with RHCs to document and share local success stories showing how each RHC uniquely addresses health priorities in their communities — from improving access to behavioral health services to strengthening partnerships for chronic disease prevention. The storytelling initiative informs state and local partners about the critical role RHCs play in improving CCLs and addressing the root causes of health disparities. These efforts enhance program cohesion and communication and help sustain the RHC model.

## How to Get Involved

- Meet the RHCs and learn how you can be a part of their impact.
- Explore the [powerful impact](#) RHCs have in their communities.
- Connect With Trailhead by emailing [info@trailhead.institute](mailto:info@trailhead.institute) or [filling out this form](#) to explore partnership.

# Workforce Programs & Initiatives

Healthy communities need a strong public health workforce. Through [Workforce Programs & Initiatives](#) (WPI), Trailhead develops and leads programs for the public health workforce across Colorado to build skills and advance careers. WPI connects people to training, mentorship, and career pathways that help them grow and serve their communities. Trailhead also supports critical infrastructure needs for public health departments across Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming, that make up the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Region 8.

WPI achieves these goals through the following programs and initiatives in Colorado:



*Lyndie Kenlon, Trailhead Institute's AmeriCorps Senior Program Manager, leads efforts to evolve Colorado's public health workforce through the integration of AmeriCorps and public health apprenticeship programs.*

*Photo credit: Taruni Donti*

## Colorado Public Health Workforce Collaborative

Trailhead launched the [Colorado Public Health Workforce Collaborative](#) (CPHWC) to provide structure and support for the field of public health through coordination and collaboration across partners leading workforce initiatives in Colorado. The collaborative, consisting of 20+ members from throughout the state, developed [RESTORE: The Colorado Blueprint for Innovative Workforce Development](#), a tool that prioritizes equitable recruitment and retention, career pathways, and actionable data for the future of the public and environmental health workforce.

## The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Community Health Worker Training Program



*Kayla Cibic, Trailhead's Workforce Development Manager, supports critical efforts to expand Colorado's community health worker workforce.*  
*Photo credit: Rachel Heacox Photography*

Trailhead administers the HRSA Community Health Worker Training Program, a multiyear, national initiative supporting training and apprenticeship efforts for the community health worker (CHW) workforce.

Working in partnership with [Patient Navigation and Community Health Worker Training Program](#) (PNCT) and [The Alliance of Colorado Community Health Workers, Patient Navigators and Promotores de Salud](#) (Alliance), the program successfully recruits people to the CHW workforce, places trainees in CHW apprenticeships and internships, delivers learning opportunities that improve skills, and helps trainees enter public health careers.

This grant has been extended without additional funding (i.e., a No Cost Extension) through September 2026 to support current apprentices as they complete their training and apprenticeship. The program is no longer accepting new participants to participate in the full CHW training or upskilling pathways.



## Colorado Public Health Works Program



*Raquel Lucero, an AmeriCorps Apprentice in Bent County, supported a mural project to engage youth, foster connection, and spread awareness and education about the risks of fentanyl to help reduce opioid use.*

*Photo Credit: Raquel Lucero*

[Colorado Public Health Works](#) (CPHW) is an integral part of the HRSA Community Health Worker Training Program and is the first integrated AmeriCorps Registered Apprenticeship program in Colorado.

Through CPHW, AmeriCorps members serve in regions throughout the state. Many members simultaneously pursue certification as a CHW through an apprenticeship registered with the U.S. Department of Labor. The program is designed to increase the capacity of local public health agencies, provide career entry into public health, and prepare Colorado's next generation of public health leaders.

In 2025, Trailhead was chosen as a program partner for [Colorado's Youth Mental Health Corps](#). Through CPHW, Youth Mental Health Corps members complete the CHW pathway and serve as a community mental health navigator connecting with youth in local community-based organizations.

## Public Health Infrastructure Grant

[The Public Health Infrastructure Grant](#) (PHIG) is a groundbreaking program funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of an unprecedented \$3.84 billion investment to support critical infrastructure needs of public health departments across the U.S.

As a PHIG partner, Trailhead leads a collaborative Hub model with the [Colorado Health Institute](#), [Montana Public Health Institute](#), and [Public Health Institute at Denver Health](#). As one of 10 Regional Innovation Hubs under the [National Network of Public Health Institutes](#) (NNPHI), Trailhead helps public health departments in HRSA Region 8—including Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming—by providing technical assistance on workforce recruitment and development, data use and modernization, and core public health competencies.



*Public health leaders from HRSA Region 8, NNPHI, and the CDC gathered at Trailhead's headquarters for the Public Health Infrastructure Grant regional convening.*  
*Photo credit: Rachel Heacox Photography*

## Engaging Military Veterans in the Public Health Workforce

WPI continues to engage Veteran-serving organizations to strengthen Colorado's public health workforce through CHW and Peer Support Specialist apprenticeships. This targeted outreach builds on strategies identified in a 2023 [literature review and environmental scan](#) conducted by Trailhead, Amaka Consulting and Evaluation Services (ACES), Black Ladies in Public Health (BLIPH), and Informing Veterans and Dependents (IVAD) that examined the needs of Veterans transitioning to civilian life and the skills they bring to the public health workforce.

## 2025 Highlights

- **Expanding Training and Upskilling for CHWs**

- Through the HRSA Community Health Worker Training Program, 58 individuals received upskilling training and 201 completed the full CHW course, strengthening Colorado's CHW workforce.
- WPI worked strategically with PNCT and the Alliance to expand awareness for apprenticeship pathways to employers. The partners also helped participants complete the state assessment to advance their CHW careers.

- **Strengthening Regional Partnerships**

- Trailhead hosted the PHIG Region 8 Convening, bringing together over 40 partners from health departments across Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Partners discussed timely strategies to build workforce resilience and sustainability. National partners from the CDC and NNPHI attended. Regular monthly meetings with NNPHI and hub leaders continue to foster trust, collaboration, and support regional public health efforts.

- **Expanding Apprenticeship Pathways**

- Through CPHW, 12 participants and six host organizations provided public health and mental health direct services to 75 people every week. The program also placed five Youth Mental Health CHW apprentices in 2025 — three of whom completed training and two who remain enrolled.
- WPI broadened paid learning and apprenticeship opportunities, including new roles for Peer Support Specialists and Youth Mental Health positions. In 2026, CPHW will expand targeted outreach to organizations who serve Veterans and individuals who have been or are currently incarcerated.

- **Strengthened Capacity and Employer Engagement:**

- WPI concluded three years of Public Health AmeriCorps funding, during which time Trailhead was awarded \$1.29 million to expand outreach, operations, and employer partnerships. The program enrolled 26 participants, 16 of whom completed their apprenticeships, with three members continuing under a No Cost Extension through the HRSA grant.

## Key Strategy in Action



### **Increasing Upskilling and Inclusive Practices to Recruit and Retain the Public Health Workforce**

#### **Building capacity for community-based initiatives to launch and scale**

WPI builds workforce capacity for entry level positions through CHW training, apprenticeship, and AmeriCorps. The program addresses unmet workforce development needs through project-based technical assistance and program administration. Trailhead prioritizes a mentorship-first approach, fostering motivation through collaborative relationships and supporting participants' interests with career exploration opportunities. Partners report that Trailhead helped them engage in equitable community health practices and leverage training to further inspire confidence and improve service delivery.

WPI also works with public health and community-based organizations to provide paid on-the-job learning. These trainings improve retention and build connections that strengthen program outcomes.



An aerial photograph of a mountain town in winter. The town is nestled at the base of a large, rugged mountain covered in patches of snow and evergreen trees. The town itself features a mix of historic-style brick buildings and modern structures. A large, semi-transparent blue circle with a white topographic line pattern is overlaid on the lower half of the image, serving as a background for the text.

## How to Get Involved

- Join the Colorado Public Health Workforce Collaborative to coordinate and inform workforce initiatives in the state of Colorado.
- Become a host site for Colorado Public Health Works and support entry-level pathways into the public health workforce.
- Explore strategies to recruit and retain public health workers, develop career and educational pathways, and improve workforce data in [RESTORE: The Colorado Blueprint for Innovative Public Health Workforce Development](#).
- Learn about [engaging Veterans](#) in the public health workforce.
- Discuss how Trailhead can support your workforce development efforts by emailing [workforce@trailhead.institute](mailto:workforce@trailhead.institute).



# Youth Sexual Health Program

Every young person has the right to receive medically accurate information so that they are empowered to make informed decisions about their health. However, young people in Colorado face inconsistent access to inclusive, evidence-based sex education.

Trailhead's [Youth Sexual Health Program](#) (YSHP) works to close this gap. YSHP leads Colorado's [Working to Institutional Sex Ed](#) (WISE) Initiative, which expands access to inclusive, evidence-based, comprehensive sex education (CSE) by collaborating with communities, organizations, collaboratives, and school districts across the state.

Trailhead believes that youth sexual health education must be inclusive, accessible, free of shame and stigma, and reflect the diverse experiences of all young people. YSHP practices these beliefs by centering youth voice, authentically engaging communities, and sharing power with people whose identities have historically been excluded from youth sexual health education and decision-making spaces.



*Taruni Donti, Michele Shimomura, Ella Meyer, Adrienne Gomez, and Ocean Candler (not pictured) attended Colorado Youth Congress' annual gala. Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health program continues to collaborate with and learn from CYC's youth leaders.*

*Photo credit: Ocean Candler*

## 2025 Highlights



*Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health Program Manager, Ocean Candler, led the creation of a flexible fee-for-service model to increase access to professional development on youth sexual health-related topics for school districts, youth-serving professionals, and trusted adults.*

*Photo credit: Taruni Donti*

### • Building Capacity Through WISE

Over the last year, YSHP engaged 12 school districts and counties as WISE partners. Trailhead's WISE support ranged from building capacity, one-on-one coaching, collaborating with youth and adults on curriculum revisions, collecting youth feedback and data, community-driven school board engagement, collaborating on professional development and community trainings, and supporting IHAM policy revisions and adoption.

### • Increasing Access to Professional Development

YSHP delivered 24 trainings and professional development opportunities to 361 educators, community leaders, parents, caregivers, and youth. These participants collectively reach over 11,789 young people in Colorado. Each training was tailored to the community's needs and offered through YSHP's [flexible fee-for-service model](#) to ensure access for all partners.

### • Fostering Collaboration

YSHP continues to foster collaboration and connection among 72 members of the Youth Sexual Health Alliance, a statewide coalition of educators, district administrators, healthcare providers, local public health departments, advocacy groups, and other key stakeholders. YSHP hosted three Alliance meetings in 2025, with partner guest speakers and co-facilitators including [Denver Health](#), [Colorado Sexual Health Initiative](#) (COSHI), and the [Colorado Office of School Safety](#).



- **Strengthening Partnerships**

YSHP invested intentional time in deepening its partnerships with CDPHE, [Colorado Department of Education](#) (CDE), [Colorado Department of Human Services](#) (CDHS), and national partners, including [Advocates for Youth](#) and the [Sex Education Collaborative](#). These partnerships have been especially important as the field navigates heightened misinformation and disinformation around sexual health education, direct attacks on youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth, and funding challenges statewide and nationally. Strong, collaborative partnerships are critical for supporting YSHP initiatives under the current administration, ensuring that evidence-based sexual health programs can continue to reach and protect young people across Colorado.

## Key Strategy in Action



### **Building CSE Community Champions Through Advocacy and Storytelling**

**Directing resources where they're needed most**

Over the last year, CSE has seen increased scrutiny. In addition, community champions and advocates across the state face increased isolation and resource barriers, specifically in school districts and rural communities. WISE relies heavily on these community leaders and partners with aligned values to support CSE efforts. YSHP aims to continue supporting confident, passionate community champions with the resources they need to support young people in their community.

This goal was addressed directly this year through the program's [Advocacy One-Pagers](#), created in collaboration with program intern Ella Meyer, with community feedback from youth on the Youth Healthcare Alliance Advisory Council and community partners in the sexual health field, public health, and education. Each one-pager is specific to an audience: youth and youth advocates, parents/caregivers, and educators and administrators. They highlight why CSE is important, present Colorado-specific information, and provide audience-specific strategies to advocate for CSE, from informal to formal ways, because advocacy can take many different forms. Readers are also encouraged to scan the QR code on the back of the resource to find additional resources that support skill-building for each strategy. These one-pagers have been a critical resource to have available to community partners, and during trainings both in and outside of schools.

Prompted by feedback, YSHP also created an advocacy workshop, Sex Ed for All: The Role of Communities in Sex Ed Advocacy. Through this community-based workshop, participants gain understanding of what CSE is, Colorado state laws that guide CSE instruction, and key positive health outcomes that are important to know for CSE advocacy. Participants also reflect on their own experiences with advocacy and explore advocacy and storytelling strategies - from talking with fellow parents to school board public comments to advocating to their state representatives. YSHP started this workshop with community partners this summer and will continue to expand it as a community offering.





## How to Get Involved

- Learn how people involved in the education system, the state of Colorado, funders, philanthropy, and community-based organizations can increase support for inclusive sexual health education through the [2023 SASH Report](#).
- Explore available [training resources](#).
- Learn how young people, parents, teachers, and administrators can [advocate](#) for CSE in their community and share your sex ed story.
- Learn more about the [science behind sex education](#).
- Discuss how Trailhead can support your training needs or youth engagement efforts by emailing [ysh@trailhead.institute](mailto:ysh@trailhead.institute).



# Trailhead Projects

*Yuliza Hernandez manages partnerships and project operations for Trailhead's community engagement research projects, supporting their launch, development, and long-term sustainability.*

*Photo credit: Taruni Donti*



Trailhead builds, sustains, and expands community-driven research by providing resources, funding, and capacity to community members who are engaged with academic research. With expertise in administration, program management, and community engagement, Trailhead helps universities build strong partnerships and ensure that people who are most impacted by health disparities can directly inform research efforts.

The Projects at Trailhead are some of the longest standing work at the organization. The work is contract-based and driven by the goals of external partners and organizations. Currently, the majority of projects are in partnership with CU. These include the projects outlined below.

## The Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute

The [Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute](#) (CCTSI) is a collaborative enterprise involving Colorado universities, research organizations, health care organizations, and multiple community organizations. Through many programs and services, the CCTSI provides the infrastructure to help build research teams, speed the development of treatments, and improve human health with the goal of reducing health disparities in the Rocky Mountain Region. Each year the CCTSI awards nearly \$3 million in pilot grants and training awards per year.

Trailhead manages all the funds that are going into the community for this program and oversees a Community Research Liaison (CRL) Program and a [Pilot Grants program](#). Within the Pilot Grants program, Trailhead oversees and reviews the Requests for Applications (RFA) process and serves to alleviate administrative burdens on the university system to better serve community partners.

## Colorado Community Engagement Alliance Against Health Disparities

The [Colorado Community Engagement Alliance Against Health Disparities](#) (CO-CEAL) is a partnership between the CU Anschutz Medical Campus, several community-based organizations, and dozens of trusted local community members. CO-CEAL's mission is to impact health disparities through active community engagement and outreach, capacity building, and long-lasting community partnerships to improve diversity and inclusion in health research.

Trailhead ensures all people who are collecting data, taking surveys, participating in Boot Camp and facilitating the processes are paid and engaged.

## Research, Engagement and Action on COVID-19 Health Outcomes via Testing

The goal of [Research, Engagement and Action on COVID-19 Health Outcomes via Testing](#) (REACH-OUT) is to improve the reach, uptake, and sustainability of COVID-19 testing among four underserved and socially or medically vulnerable populations via a community-based, participatory action research approach. This project was built from the work of both CCTSI and CO-CEAL in the specific area of COVID-19 testing hesitancy.

## Disparities Elimination through Coordinated Interventions to Prevent and Control Heart and Lung Disease Risk

Heart and lung disease are the leading causes of illness and death in the United States, and the disease burden is unequal across groups defined by race, ethnicity, sex and/or gender, and socioeconomic status. [Disparities Elimination through Coordinated Interventions to Prevent and Control Heart and Lung Disease Risk](#) (DECIPHeR) is an initiative to address health disparities in diverse Colorado communities through community, school, and health sector engagement. The overarching goal is to help underserved kids with uncontrolled asthma live healthier lives.

## Health Care Provider Training Program

Colorado's [Health Care Provider Training Grant Program](#) works to improve access to care and health outcomes for underserved and marginalized communities by providing funding to nonprofit organizations, health care providers, and health care associations to develop culturally relevant and affirming trainings for health care providers. All trainings through the Health Care Provider Training Grant program adhere to the national CLAS standards and focus on capacity building, cultural responsiveness, and improvements to the quality of healthcare for underserved and marginalized communities.

Trailhead administers the grant program on behalf of the [Office of Health Equity](#) and CDPHE.

## Climate Change Engagement to Support Resilient Communities

The [Mountain West Climate-Health Engagement Hub](#) is a collaborative partnership to promote climate resilience and health equity for rural and urban communities. The project seeks to understand how rural and urban communities in the Mountain West are experiencing climate stressors (drought, air quality, and wildfires) and what current and future actions they envision to build climate resilience and advance health equity.

The project is based at the [Colorado School of Public Health](#) and funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Agreement (OT2HL158287) through the [Alliance for Community Engagement for Climate and Health](#).

Trailhead ensures community members are compensated quickly and efficiently for their work in university-based advisory boards.



## 2025 Highlights

- **Supporting Community-Engaged Research**

CCTSI and Trailhead have begun their 17th year of partnership, providing over 75 pilot grant awards to support community-based participatory research throughout communities in Colorado.

- **Compensating Community Members Quickly**

Throughout all of these programs, Trailhead provided quick and direct funding support to hundreds of community members who shared their insights through surveys, community advisory boards, or community-driven research.

- **Expanding Partnerships**

Trailhead is exploring new collaborations with university partners for three additional projects in the coming year.

## Key Strategy in Action



### **Building, Sustaining, and Growing Community-Driven Research**

**Directing resources where they are needed most**

Communities often struggle navigating the bureaucracy of academic administrations. Trailhead provides direct support so that community members who want to engage in research can develop and provide critical insight into interventions and methods that are most meaningful for their communities.

## How to Get Involved

Contact Trailhead at [info@trailhead.institute](mailto:info@trailhead.institute) to learn how you can participate in community-engaged research.



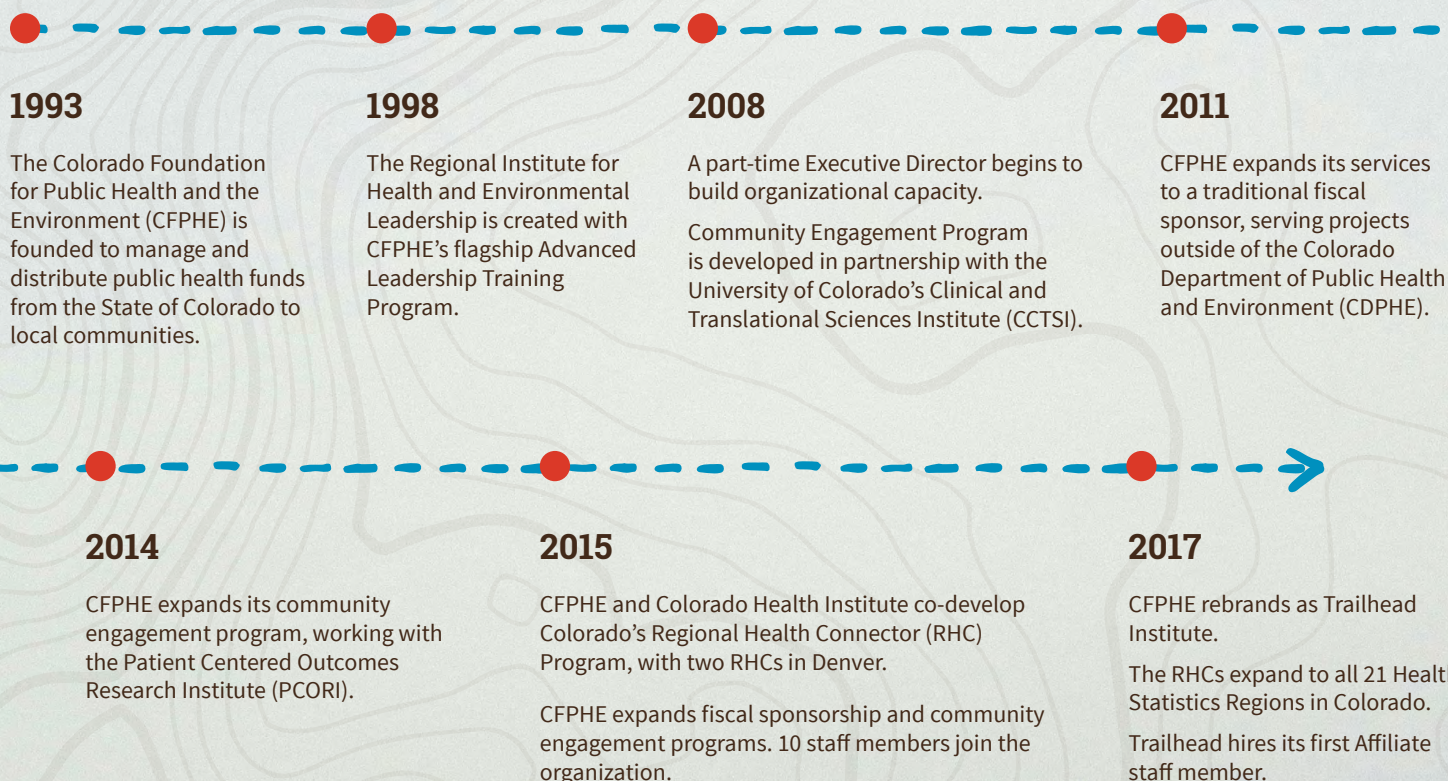
# Trailhead's History

Trailhead was founded in 1993 as the Colorado Foundation for Public Health and the Environment to manage state public health funds and make it easier to get those resources to communities across Colorado. In the three decades since the organization's founding, Trailhead has evolved as a strategic partner to community-based organizations, government agencies, academic institutions, and philanthropic entities working to address Colorado's public health challenges.

Trailhead's flagship fiscal sponsorship approach – known as its Administrative Partnership Program – has scaled. In 2025, Trailhead used its administrative resources and operational infrastructure to help more than 50 community-based organizations grow their missions and lead solutions to local health challenges in Colorado.

Trailhead's work further strengthens Colorado's public health system by developing and implementing programs that meet unmet public health needs, build connections across communities, reduce administrative burdens that make public health work difficult, and make sure that public health efforts are sustainable across Colorado.

Trailhead's history reflects the organization's growth and longstanding efforts to strengthen Colorado's public health system through collaboration and innovation.





# Trailhead's History, cont.

## 2018

Trailhead becomes the Program Office for the Provecho Collective (previously known as Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger).

Trailhead integrates the Youth Sexual Health Program (YSHP) from Colorado Youth Matter (CYM) as a program after CYM announces its closure.

## 2019

YSHP works with nine rural and urban school districts through Working to Institutionalize Sex Education.

Trailhead welcomes 13 new Administrative Partners. Strong revenue growth of \$4.39 million through both new and ongoing partnerships.

## 2020

Trailhead manages the COVID-19 Emergency Hunger Relief Fund. Awards over 400 grants and \$4.3 million by February 2021.

Trailhead's Colorado Public Health Workforce Collaborative starts, uniting nonprofits, government, hospitals, and higher education in COVID-19 containment.

Trailhead administers the Colorado Farm & Food Systems Respond & Rebuild Fund, distributing nearly \$2 million to local producers, benefiting over 250 farmers and families.

## 2021

Trailhead supports Colorado's first Community Health Worker apprenticeship program and CHW training.

RHC is recognized in Colorado's Behavioral Health Recovery Act, receiving \$1 million to expand behavioral health work.

30 fiscally sponsored partners for community-driven solutions.

## 2022

Colorado Public Health Works (CPHW), an integrated AmeriCorps Registered Apprenticeship program, begins.

Trailhead and the Colorado Health Institute co-locate.

Trailhead grows to 37 staff and affiliates.

## 2023

Trailhead becomes a regional hub partner for the CDC's Public Health Infrastructure Grant.

YSHP implements a Fee-for-Service model and has partners across Colorado, including in San Luis Valley, Chaffee County, the Western Slope, and Metro Denver.

Trailhead administers the Health Care Provider Training Grant Program for the Office of Health Equity. Over 1,700 health care providers complete 106 training sessions to better serve marginalized communities.

## 2024

The Colorado Cancer Coalition (CCC) becomes a program of Trailhead.

Trailhead is a host site for Colorado's Youth Mental Health Corps..

Trailhead nearly doubles in size, growing to 49 staff and affiliate staff.

\$16 million in revenue generated for community-driven solutions from 43 fiscally sponsored projects.





# Giving Gratitude

People are at the heart of the work, impact, and growth reflected within this report. It is through the passion, wisdom, and commitment of Trailhead's Staff, Affiliate Staff, and Board of Directors that the organization continues to evolve and meet the needs of Colorado communities, partners, and the state's public health system. We are grateful to journey alongside one another in Trailhead's work this year:

## Trailhead Staff

**Adrienne Gomez**, Senior Program Manager

**Benjamin Robb**, MSW, Senior Director of Projects & Partnerships

**Carolyn Hamburg**, Hiring and Onboarding Manager

**Ella Meyer**, Project Manager

**Gabriel Mansfield**, MPPA, Project Manager

**Ida Nelson**, Finance Manager

**Jami Hiyakumoto**, Program Coordinator

**Juan Carlos Machuca**, Finance Manager

**Julie Bañuelos**, Accounting Manager

**Kayla Cibic**, MPH, Workforce Manager

**Lisa Olcese**, MS-Organizational Leadership, ACC, Senior Director of Operations

**Lyndie Kenlon**, AmeriCorps Senior Program Manager

**Maggie Youkhana**, Regional Health Connector Program Manager

**Matthew Plecha**, Grants and Contracts Accountant

**Michele Shimomura**, MS, MPH, President and Executive Director

**Natalie Finke**, Bookkeeper

**Ocean Candler**, Youth Sexual Health Manager

**Sara Scarim-Smith**, Operations Manager

**Tess Burick**, Senior Communications Manager

**Tyler Shirey**, Director of Finance

**Yuliza Hernandez**, Projects Manager

## Board of Directors

**Bruno Sobral**, Board Member

**Erica Snow**, MS, MPA, Board Member

**Jennifer Ludwig**, Board Vice Chair

**Kaia Gallagher**, PhD, Board Member

**Lauren Gase**, PhD, Board Member

**Lisa Case**, Board Member

**Meghan Guevara**, MPH, Board Chair

**Melanie Zeitler**, Board Member

Special thanks to **Jana Persky**, **Tom Butts**, and **Susan Perrigo** who completed their Board terms and provided invaluable insight and guidance to Trailhead.



## Affiliate Staff

Trailhead's team also includes affiliate staff who work on their own distinct programs and projects supporting communities across Colorado.

While not specifically reflected in this Annual Report, we recognize the impactful work of:

### Provecho Collective (formerly the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger)

**Bryanna Patinka**, Development Director

**Charlie Kestler**, Community Justice Manager

**Dayana Leyva**, MPH, CHES, Policy Manager

**Dolores Ramirez**, Executive Director of Community

**Grace Benasutti**, Community Justice Coordinator

**Greta Žukauskaitė**, Grants/Reimbursement Manager

**Joël McClurg**, Executive Director of Integration

**Kassandra Neiss**, Data and Evaluation Analyst

**Leticia Macias**, Executive Assistant / Translator

**Michelle Ray**, Visibility Director

**Brace Gibson**, J.D., Policy Director

### Colorado Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative

**Roger Low**, CEO & Founder

### Jefferson County Food Policy Council

**Hallie Nelson**, Director

**Anemone Salome**, Community Organizer

**Javier Alvarado Vega**, BA, Organizing Manager

### Morgan County Interagency Oversight Group

**Elaine Horton**, Coordinator

### Triad Bright Futures

**Amber Troutman**, M.S., Mountain Communities Coordinator

**Jennifer Anton**, Executive Director

**Ana Cecilia Carballo**, UPK Program Manager

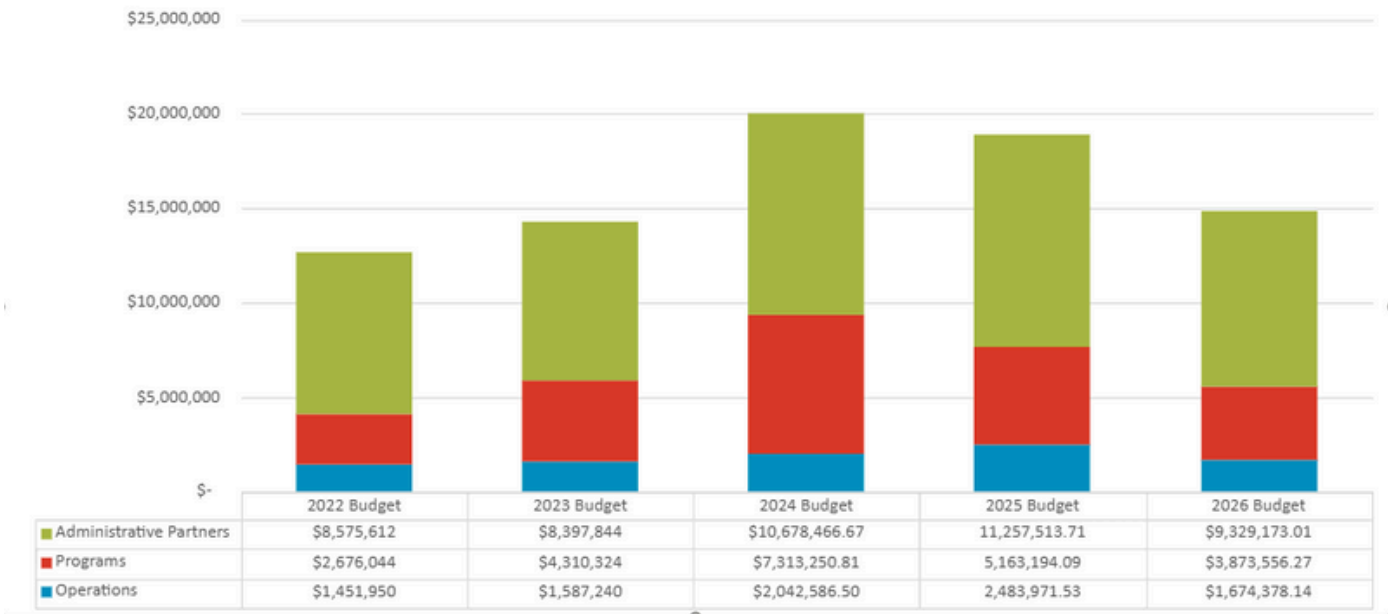
**Lisa Duran**, M.A., Project Manager

### The Food Security Network

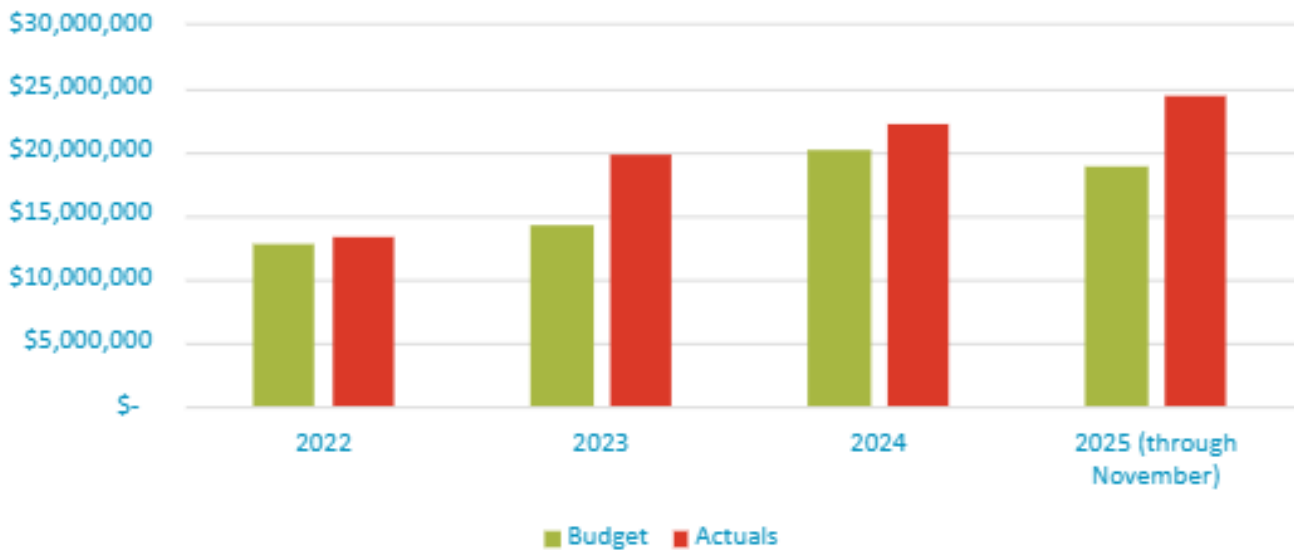
**Erika Wey**, MPH, Director

# Trailhead Budget History & 2026 Financials

## Trailhead Budget History

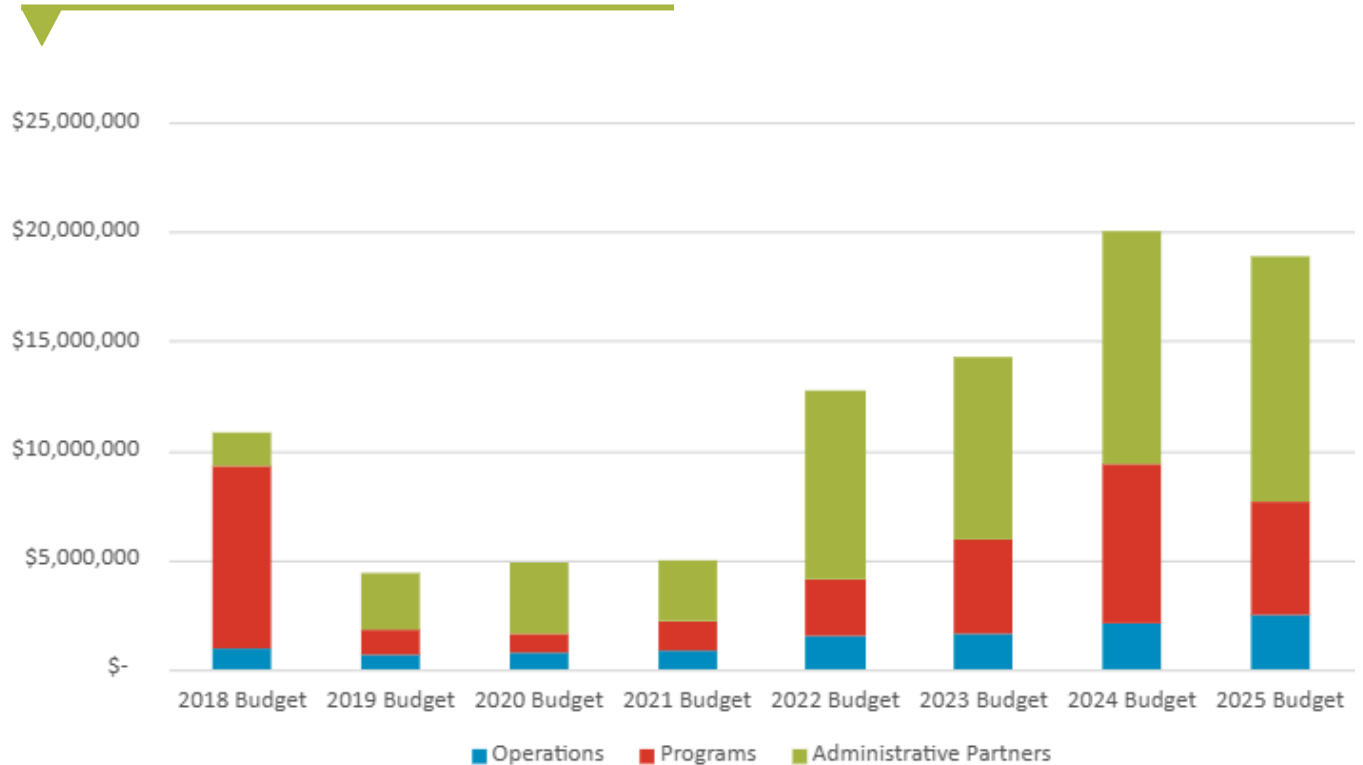


## Trailhead Budget vs. Actual





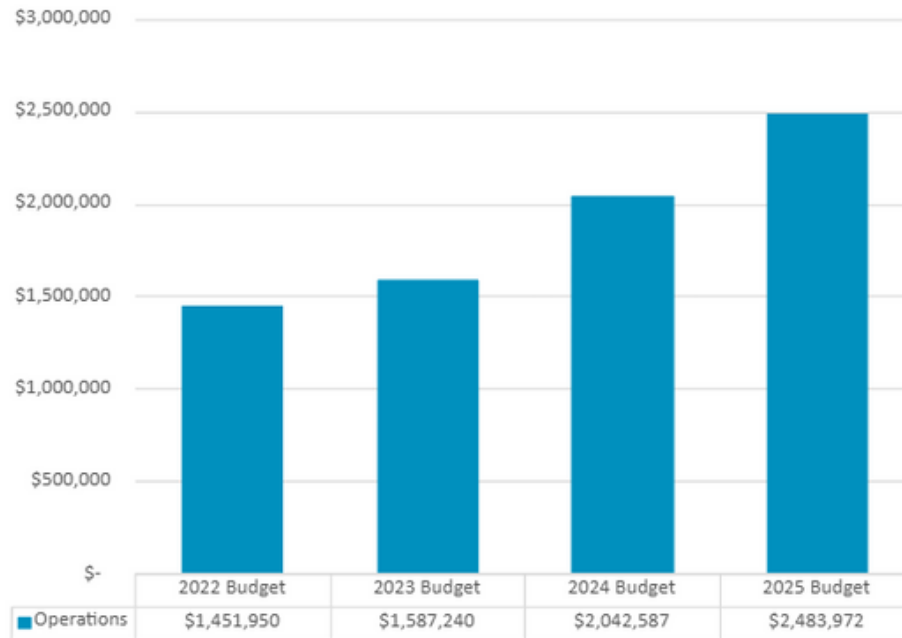
## Annual Budget Numbers by Fund



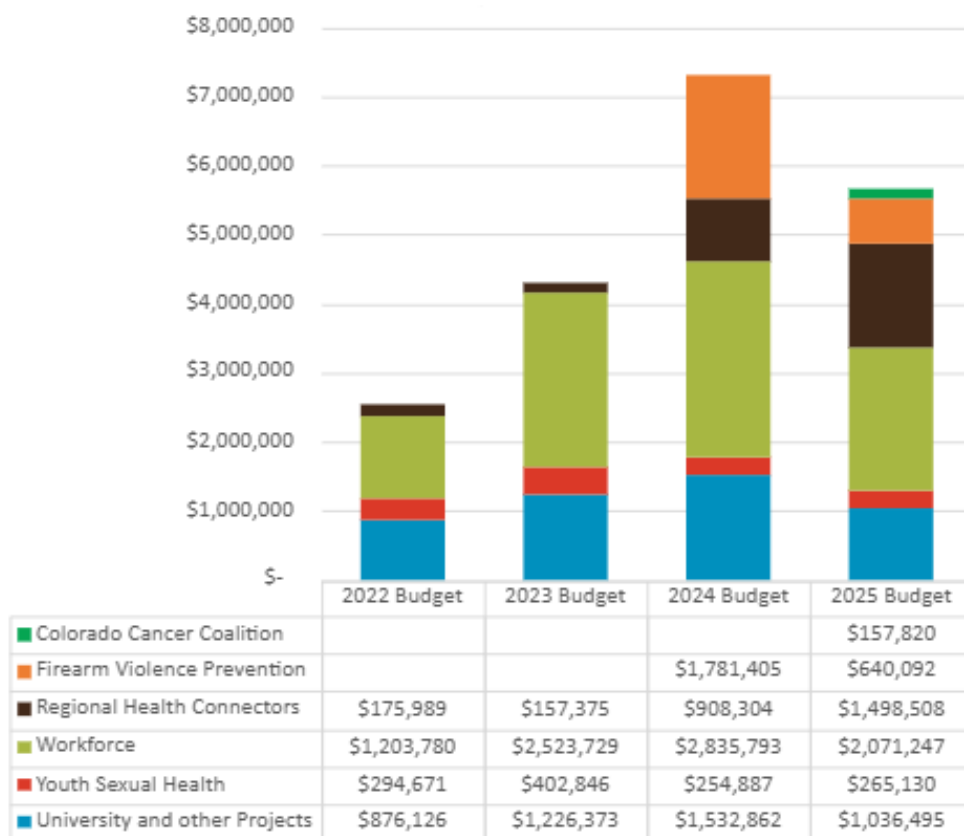
## FTE Summary

Fiscal Year	2024	2025	2026
Operations	6.16	7.43	3.44
Finance	5.52	6.47	4.48
APP	2.79	4.10	2.95
Programs	15.57	14.01	9.17
Affiliate	15.00	27.00	20
<b>Total FTE</b>	<b>45.04</b>	<b>59.01</b>	<b>40.01</b>

## Operations Budget History



## Programs Budget History





# Administrative Partnership Program Budget History

