

I. INTRODUCTION

1. CEDS Definition and Purpose

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) refers to the planning process and document generated from it which sets forth the San Luis Valley's economic development vision, goals, strategies, and priorities in the next five years from 2014-2018. CEDS work for the Valley is carried out by the San Luis Valley Development Resources Group (SLVDRG), which is part of its responsibilities as one of the nation's 300 or more Economic Development District organizations designated and funded to provide these functions by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

The 2013 CEDS represents the sixth major update, and is intended to build upon previous versions as a framework for economic development planning and as an essential reference document. Previous editions of the CEDS (formerly referred to as the Overall Economic Development Program) were completed in 1992, 1984, and 1979 by the SLVDRG's predecessor agency the San Luis Valley Regional Development and Planning Commission.

Beyond the document itself, work on the CEDS is intended to be ongoing, and provides the flexibility for annual reviews and evaluation of the strategies being carried out in order to make an effective response in the programming efforts to changing economic conditions, or in order to respond to new and unforeseen opportunities. As a performance-based plan, the CEDS will serve a critical role in the region's efforts to defend against economic dislocations due to global trade, competition, and other events resulting in the loss of jobs and private investment.

We noted previously that the CEDS could be viewed as the economic development master plan for the Valley, with desired outcomes and action steps aimed at:

- Creating better jobs and incomes.
- Diversifying the economy and strengthening economic sectors.
- Exposing new market potentials and business opportunities.
- Protecting resources and environment.
- Increasing local capacities for development.
- Developing and improving infrastructure.
- Providing the economic development tools and structure capable of responding to new opportunities.
- And enhancing the quality of life in general.

Considerable effort was made in this process to choose the strategies and priorities most likely to produce these outcomes and offering the best returns on investment of time, money, and staff resources. Priorities reflect the input provided by individual counties in our region concerning their goals and concerns, and are based on in-depth analysis of the industry and social fabric of all six counties and how they tie together as a regional economy and entity.

2. CEDS Background and Requirements

Guidelines followed in preparing the CEDS are those released by EDA regulations contained in 13 CFR 303. EDA programs in Colorado are administered by the Denver Regional Office, which includes 10 states in the central Rockies and Great Plains.

The District boundaries coincide with the region, which includes the counties of Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache in South-Central Colorado known as the San Luis Valley. While these counties are unique and diverse in many ways, a strong regional emphasis is imparted in the CEDS guidelines, and the general perspective of the region as a whole is reflected in the format and analysis.

Consistency of local projects with the CEDS is a primary factor in consideration for EDA funding from Public Works and Economic Adjustment grants, and the amount awarded for Valley projects exceeds \$1 million. Counties and cities with membership in the District are also eligible for an additional 10 percent federal funding for their projects. Districts who qualify on the basis of an approved CEDS and other performance criteria receive annual planning grants, and development of the 2013 CEDS document is included as an element in our current work program.

Goals and priorities in the CEDS also provide the framework for SLVDRG in determining its annual work programs focused on portions of the full plan which can be accomplished or advanced within a 12-month period. Annual CEDS Reports are also prepared at mid-year in order to keep current on changing conditions, describe what is working, and revise selected strategies and priorities as may be appropriate. Very few, if any, other economic development efforts are subjected to this level of evaluation and record of accountability.

3. Products and Benefits

Besides its obvious advantages for funding and guarantee of a continuous and updated planning effort, the CEDS is a one-of-a-kind document, which is truly regional and comprehensive in subject scope and content. Due to its convenience as a central index for data, the CEDS Analysis Section has value within its own right, and is probably one of the Valley's most frequently referenced documents for grantwriting and other study. Based on past experience, we anticipate a wide range of use represented by governments; land use and planning departments; feasibility studies; demographers; program administrators; banks; existing and prospective businesses; farmers and farm service agencies; tourists and tourist organizations; chambers of commerce; local and county-based economic development groups; downtown developers; emergency services; job training and employment agencies; hospitals and clinics; health professionals; news media; non-profits; development practitioners; consultants of all types; real estate agents; private foundations; transportation planners; accountants; appraisers; target group advocates; lawyers and courts; nature-based organizations; industry prospects; conservation groups; law enforcement; community service agencies; senior organizations; social researchers; market researchers; authors and writers; students; schools; libraries; educators; churches; newcomers and prospective residents; Business Loan Fund clients of SLVDRG; and many more.

In order to preserve extensive material produced from previous editions, some portions of data presentations are retained where no essential change was identified and still useful to the analysis of current economic conditions. Much of the data comes from 2010 Census and the Census' American Community Survey.

To reach a wider audience, the SLVDRG will present the final version of the 2013 CEDS on its Website, www.slvdr.org, along with previous editions. Internet access provides greater convenience in reviewing the content, and potential for additional input to the planning process.