

Roaring Fork Leadership 2021

Team Four Score

# Entrepreneurship in the Roaring Fork Valley

Project Report

April 2021

# Outline

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## Summary

This document was researched and developed by Team Four Score with the 2021 cohort of the Roaring Fork Leadership Academy for Evan Zislis of Bonedale Business Academy. The purpose of this report is to explore the sustainability and need for entrepreneurialism as a solution for economic resiliency within the Roaring Fork Valley. The research was conducted by interviewing local business and community leaders while focusing on economic factors and issues entrepreneurs face in the Roaring Fork Valley; this research's findings point to entrepreneurialism being a mechanism to financial and business freedom, but it is not without challenges.

# Statistics and Introduction

2020 was an emotional and challenging year that most of us will never forget. It was a year full of uncertainty, stress and fear. The global pandemic of COVID-19 turned our world upside-down and completely changed our way of life. While the disease made its way from coast to coast of the United States, many people contracted it while over 500,000 perished from the disease. Those that survived and those that were not directly infected, were affected in other ways. The virus brought on unprecedented infection control measures that included lockdowns for all but the most essential people. For much of the year, society stayed home and avoided travel. This meant that despite government assistance, some businesses and job positions would not survive the pandemic. The travel, recreation, entertainment and hospitality industry were some of the hardest hit industries. Unemployment soared and people were left without income.

The Roaring Fork Valley in Colorado was hit particularly hard due to its reliance on tourism. The once bustling streets of Aspen and Snowmass resembled that of a ghost town. Store fronts, shops and boutiques were shuttered. Aspen/Pitkin County Airport, the third busiest airport in the state of Colorado, sat vacant of aircraft and passengers. The world-famous ski resorts of Aspen were empty and bare leaving an eerie and post-apocalyptic feel. When the tourists stopped coming, the workers that relied on them were left jobless and without income. What were these workers to do? That is the question that Team Four Score set out to answer.

As you will read, the team explored the possibility of and viability of entrepreneurialism as an answer to that question. Due to the heavy reliance on tourism and hospitality in the Roaring Fork Valley, which can be drastically impacted by not only pandemics, but other events like economic crashes, terrorism events and natural disasters, the team was tasked to explore the possibility of entrepreneurialism to provide income and self-reliance for those that were affected by the pandemic. The team went out into the community and spoke with local stakeholders that have inside knowledge of both entrepreneurialism and the state of unemployment.

The first thing the team did was examine unemployment statistics to get a feel for the extent of the economic impacts of the pandemic. As of February 2021, 13.3 million people reported that they were out of work due to their employer closing from the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Unemployment peaked at 14.8% in April of 2020, a rate never before seen on the national level<sup>2</sup>. In Colorado, the unemployment rate rose to a peak of 12.1% in April of 2020<sup>3</sup>. In Pitkin County, specifically, the employment rate went from 2.8% to 8.7% over the course of 2020<sup>4</sup>. Across the State of Colorado, the leisure and hospitality industry was by far the hardest hit industry during the pandemic, seeing a 26.4% decrease in employment over the 12 months in 2020<sup>5</sup>.

1: <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

2: <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>

3: [https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST0800000000000003?amp%253bdata\\_tool=XGtable&output\\_view=data&include\\_graphs=true](https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST0800000000000003?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true)

4: <https://www.colmigateway.com/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/Dec20PR.pdf>

5: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

## Stakeholder Research

After reviewing the statistics, we felt we needed to understand the state of unemployment in the Valley; to this point, each member of the team spoke with local stakeholders. The conversations and understanding gained are documented in the notes below:

## Small Business Owner Interviews

One of, if not the central thesis of this civic project was to investigate whether entrepreneurialism and/or self-employment is a viable mechanism to achieve sustained financial independence. In the course of this investigation, a key phrase that came up repeatedly was, "near-term economic recovery and long-term economic Resilience." While each of us had an idea of what we think that means, we decided to seek out existing businesses that we felt exemplify those descriptors and then interview those business owners to see if they could provide any insights into what behaviours and choices they felt helped foment their own economic recovery and resilience, that could be passed on to would-be entrepreneurs just starting out now. And whereas there was either tacitly, if not expressly, a focus on "diversifying" entrepreneurship in the Roaring Fork Valley in this investigation, we sought out small businesses that were not directly related to tourism, oil and gas, or the construction industries. Ultimately we chose to interview Brion After, owner of Independence Run & Hike in Carbondale; Ami Maes, owner of Handmakery--A children's art studio, in Carbondale; Charlie Chacos, owner of Bonfire coffee company, in Carbondale; and Richard Rosenfeld, Owner of Two Leaves & A Bud tea company based out of Basalt.

Brion After opened Independence Run & Hike, a running and hiking apparel and shoe store, in Carbondale in 2006. Unfortunately, the business climate of the last decade and a half has been less than ideal for Brion what with the great recession of (circa) 2007/2008--which by some measures (citation needed) took a decade to recover from--and now the current economic downturn from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to two major economic slow downs of the early 21st-century, Independence Run & Hike, as a traditional "brick and mortar" business, has also faced increased competition from online shopping--an emergent, and powerful economic trend of the last two decades. But despite these adversities, Brion's business not only survived, but thrived in the last decade-and-a-half. In the last 15 years Independence Run & Hike grew out of its original space and moved to a larger shopping center; then underwent a major store remodel in 2015; and has continued to expand the number of staff employed there, as well as the number of community events sponsored by the store.. For these reasons, we felt Brion After is an excellent example of an entrepreneur whose business exemplifies both economic recovery and resilience.

Ami Maes is the owner of Handmakery: A children's Art Studio, in Carbondale Colorado. Ami ran her business out of the Carbondale Middle School art room, where she was also the school art teacher from 1999 – 2017, before she left to run her Handmakery business full-time. During that time Ami was also an art instructor for the Anderson Ranch Art Center in Snowmass, the Aspen Art Museum, the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, and The Art Base Community Art Center in Basalt. A central question of this investigation concerns whether entrepreneurialism (& self-employment) can be a viable mechanism to achieve sustained financial independence, especially during and after the pandemic. The Bonedale Business Incubator hypothesized the answer is yes, but lacked corroboration. Ami was selected as a stakeholder because despite the challenges of self-employment prior to the pandemic, Handmakery was one of the few businesses in the Roaring Fork Valley that was able to continue to safely offer in-person, hands-on programming for kids, which represents one anecdotally positive affirmation of the hypothesis. We chose Ami as a stakeholder because we perceived Handmakery's business model as an example of a type of business someone else could replicate for themselves to create personal opportunity as we move toward economic resilience and recovery in the Roaring Fork Valley.

“Before an idea can take flight, one must have the proper mindset to be successful,” said Richard Rosenfeld, creator of Two Leaves and a Bud tea company. Unlike some of the other interviewees, Richard felt that some of our investigative questions were misguided and interjected his own view of the “right” answers to the questions he felt we should have been asking, which chiefly concerned the mindset for a would-be entrepreneur. He felt that above all, it’s paramount that a would-be entrepreneur is to embody a “lifestyle of entrepreneurialism,” by which he meant that it’s not enough that an entrepreneur to have an interest in making money in one’s chosen industry, but that there has to be a focus on and passion for solving problems. Rosenfeld’s responses during the interview can generally be summarized by his repeatedly pointing the interviewer at his idea that entrepreneurship should not be about generating profit and/or addressing unemployment, but instead that the entrepreneur should set out to solve problems in their industry, and possibly make money in the process. In addition to having the right focus, Rosenfeld said that he felt that having a little bit of “constant paranoia” was good for survival. Constantly worrying about what was going to go wrong next is a mindset that helps him avoid disasters, he said, but also added that he had not slept a full night in decades. Finally, Rosenfeld added that while keeping a vigilance to anticipate potential problems, striving for a healthy balance between dreams and reality were valuable traits of a successful entrepreneur.

Charlie Chacos is the co-owner of Bonfire Coffee company and the Village Smithy restaurant, both in Carbondale. Charlie’s parents Chris & Terry Chacos, entrepreneurs themselves, opened the popular Village Smithy restaurant in an old blacksmithing building (hence the name) in Carbondale, in 1975. Growing up Charlie swore that he would have nothing to do with the family business, but changed his tune after taking business courses at the University of Colorado in the 90’s and ultimately decided to buy the restaurant from his parents as a way for them to retire, in 1998. Charlie and his business partner then bought the coffee shop that is now Bonfire Coffee in 2011. Charlie also owns Defiant Bean Roasters, located in Glenwood Springs (which supplies Bonfire with coffee beans) in conjunction with the coffee shop. No stranger to entrepreneurship, Charlie’s overall message was that it takes a lot of time and energy to get a business started up. “You have to be prepared to jump off multiple cliffs, not just one,” he said. Charlie also said he thought was important to learn and grow from your mistakes along the way to being a successful entrepreneur. One mistake he cited as an example was his desire to expand his business too quickly. Charlie opened a second Bonfire coffee location in Willits shopping center in Basalt, and even though he prepared and planned for 12-18 months before opening, he realized after-the-fact that he didn’t spend enough time doing location research, and unfortunately he quickly found out that there wasn’t enough regular business happening at that location to justify keeping it open. In hindsight, he wished that he would have “stood in the area” for some time to understand the real foot traffic business potential. He said that he “greatly underestimated that people preferred the convenience of the nearby Starbucks over the better quality coffee.” Charlie’s ability to adapt and change his business, even in the face of set-backs, demonstrates economic resilience and recovery, and thus why he was selected as a stakeholder interviewee.

In the course of these interviews we identified some consistent challenges that entrepreneurs must be aware of before taking the dive into business. Some of these challenges are ones that will be encountered anywhere in the country, but some of them are unique to the Roaring Fork Valley, as presented here:

## Financing

As expected, we found that the business owners we interviewed all had similar advice for would-be entrepreneurs regarding start-up costs: the best way to start a successful business is to start with a comfortable amount of capital. One piece of advice from Charlie Chacos was for entrepreneurs to "start up with as much capital as possible so that you can hire additional personnel to help keep hours under control in the first years." As an example Charlie said that he wished he'd hired an accountant from the beginning, and in retrospect felt it would have been beneficial to help him meet deadlines and stay on top of the books/payroll. "It's not a get rich quick plan; (you) have to be prepared to weather the storm for the first few years until the business stabilizes and starts making money." he said. When trying to figure out how much start-up capital a new business owner will need, our interviewees said that it was important to first determine the amount of revenue that will be required to pay off the monthly payment for all your assets including employees, utilities, insurance, office/retail space, legal fees, advertising, inventory, operating costs, taxes, permits, and your own salary. A new entrepreneur should build their business model from that analysis to be sure of all your costs to ensure you are always cash positive, they advised.

But in terms of where to obtain start-up capital new businesses will need, Jonathan Feldman dispelled for us the notion that contrary to popular belief local banks, such as Alpine Bank, readily offer small business loans to entrepreneurs. Banks, he says, are really not interested in high-risk investments. Investments come with risk. Banks want to mitigate risk and fund "sure things," he said. And many new entrepreneurships are often not a sure thing from the bank's perspective. Jonathan said the advice Alpine Bank often has for potential new business is to try to encourage them save up start-up money, or borrow from family, and then run a smaller version of the business than they dream of and to first establish a good financial "track record" for a few years, before approaching a bank or credit union about a business loan. Jonathan shared that in his view as a bank VP the most important things a would-be entrepreneur can do is get their own, personal finances in order. "Pay your bills on time--including personal credit cards--and establish good-to-great credit and have good financial references. If you don't have an existing business, the banks have little to judge you on to see if you are a good candidate for a loan, or are a potential risk, other than your own personal financial situation. Many (would-be entrepreneurs) fail to do that before coming to us." he said. After all, loans are an investment not just in a business, but in a person. Entrepreneurs should keep in mind that lenders will want to see a history of personal success and financial stability before they will grant a loan. In the course of our interviews the "Shark Tank" prescription often came up as an example of how investors/ lenders will evaluate your request for funding. An entrepreneur will not only need to sell your idea for a company, but also will need to "sell" your audience on you as a person.

In conclusion, we discovered from these interviews that would-be entrepreneurs can and should plan extensively for acquiring start-up capital either before laying the ground work for actually opening a business, or as a detailed part of the initial business plan. Entrepreneurs should consider financial options such as investing personal funds, bringing on investors, shopping around for a good company credit card (this will help build your company's credit), or looking at potential grant options before looking to obtain a banked backed business loan.

## **Fatigue/Time**

From all the interviews, we can safely conclude that starting up a business will likely require long hours, especially in the early stages. Brion After said he regularly worked over 80 hours per week when he first opened Independence Run & Hike, and that was even with having two employees to shoulder the load at the time. Charlie Chacos recalls he was “only” working 60 hours a week when he started Bonfire Coffee, but that was in addition to co-operating the Village Smithy restaurant. And Ami Maes worked more than 40 hours per week for over a decade as a middle school art teacher, and “countless hours” running her Handmakery business on top of that. But, she said that now that Hanmakery is her exclusive business, she has a decent work/life balance, but that came after 20 years! At the end of the day, each of our interviewees impressed upon us that the business owner is personally responsible for the success of the business, and that means that while hiring employees is often an essential requirement, putting in lots of time and effort yourself as the owner/entrepreneur is mandatory. The long hours can take its toll on a person’s well-being. Consider starting with additional capital to hire help wherever possible including regular labor, bookkeeping services, marketing services, etc. Have a plan for self-care to avoid getting burnt out. Consider having a partner to share the duties and overall time commitment.

## **Location**

Some businesses may require a physical location and storefront retail space if you are selling a product or an office space where multiple team members can collaborate or where clients can meet with you and these entrepreneurship can’t be run virtually or from home. Brion After, said regarding this that while it was hypothetically possible to operate his type of sporting goods business “virtually,” having a brick-and-mortar presence is what allows him to connect with, and maintain his customer base, and he sees in-person connection with customers as vital to his business’ success. Ami Maes was able to “borrow” space from the Carbondale Middle School for many years for her Handmakery business, and she said she would encourage entrepreneurs to get creative with their “starter space.” But, In the Roaring Fork Valley, leasable space is especially difficult to find. Not only is space limited in general but it comes at a high cost due to a low supply and high demand. Ami Maes added that even after she secured commercial space in downtown Carbondale, rising rents is still--and she thinks it will always be--a big issue for businesses. Ami told us that in her opinion the rising cost of commercial rent in the valley is a major issue that can make-or-break existing businesses, let alone a new one. Her advice to would-be entrepreneurs in this regard is to try to negotiate multi-year leases with landlords before committing to a space. While moving to a new location because of increasing rent is not the end of the world, she said, it can be a major disruption of business. In general, all the interviewees recommended entrepreneurs reach out to at least three commercial leasing brokers to find the right one that will help you find what you are looking for, and for some business, consider whether your business can operate remotely, or look at co-working space which can be affordable and may even offer opportunity for networking. But, they all said, any asset such as a physical working space needs to be factored into your financial plan.

## **Creating Your Team**

Hiring and maintaining the right people for your team will take time and money. Charlie Chacos said that finding the right employee “fit” to successfully help him run his business took years. And, Brion After said that while his first four employees in 2006 were a great addition to his operation, all of them eventually left because they couldn’t afford to live in the Roaring Fork Valley, even with the competitive wage Brion was paying in the retail sector. So, affordable housing for potential employees is also an important factor to consider in creating your business team. This challenge is especially endemic to the Roaring Fork Valley because it’s an expensive place to live and much of the transient population here is focused more on recreation than finding employment. As a business owner, you will have to balance your expectations of owning a business in Aspen as being much different than owning one in Denver, or Chicago as Brion said, in terms of the people you have to select from.

All the interviewees suggested that taking the time to think about what exactly what a business owner is looking for in an employee is a must, and that you want people that both fit the image of your company and that you can trust. Remember, they said, an entrepreneur isn’t only creating a new business, they’re create a culture, and that starts with not just a good business plan, but also at the hiring process. The interviewees either tacitly or explicitly recommended putting a good deal of thought into this part of the business plan, and recommended entrepreneurs consider implementing a training program that is encouraging and fulfilling to new hires right from the start. People are an asset and training them and promoting them is an investment. Entrepreneurs need to expend effort to invest in their employees equally as much as their start-up costs, or find out the hard way that you can lose that investment.

## **Change**

Finally, all the interviewees admonished us that while entrepreneurship can be an exciting endeavor to be sure, they also all experienced an anxiety that came alo with abandoning a job with benefits, healthcare and other perks, and say that the trade off of stability for potential--but not guaranteed--economic independence can be daunting. And furthermore, they all reiterated that creating a new business, while continuing to work at a current job may be necessary, but will definitely be exhausting. Brion, Ami, Richard and Charlie all said that while they’re glad they started their own businesses, they’d advise a would-be entrepreneur to take time to weigh the pros and cons of such a momentous change. And, almost as an unplanned segue into our teams’ investigation into other entrepreneurial resources, the interviewees one, consistent piece of advice was that would-be entrepreneurs reach out to other local businesses (but not direct competitors) to interview them about their success, but also the business support entities here in the valley, such as local chambers of commerce, the small business association, or a place like Coventure and ask to ask for feedback. While critical feedback on something that may be your dream venture can often be hard to receive, this process they said will help you understand your strengths and weaknesses in the long run as an entrepreneur, and may help you gain the wisdom of their experience and avoid the same pitfalls.

## **Conclusion of Interviews**

The general assessment of our interviewees is that the Roaring Fork Valley is a good place for entrepreneurship to take hold, but cautioned that would-be entrepreneurs really need to do their homework with regard to what problems/business opportunities exist here, and to plan conservatively and focus on their passion, not the fantastic perks of operating a business in world-class setting. All of the interviewees we talked to found the idea of entrepreneurship as means to chasing “epic powder days” and other recreational aspirations fallacious, to the point of comical! In conclusion, the testimonials and anecdotal information we gleaned from our interviewees suggest that entrepreneurship can be a solution for resolving near-term economic recovery and long term economic resilience available to the community, but with the specific caveats treated above. And entrepreneurialism can be a viable mechanism to achieve sustained financial independence but it requires an alignment of ideals, resources, and drive, that if done right can not only provide a solution to an individual, but an entire community.

## Municipal Agencies

**Erin McCuskey, SBDC & Kris Mattera, Basalt Chamber** - they worked together on several projects.

- Tell me a bit about how you each support small business owners and how you work together.

SBDC provides free access to resources for businesses. Connect to participate in classes on how to start. Access free one on one consulting – startup and existing. Virtually always and can be in person.

The Basalt Chamber – central hub serves as a connector to resources – when people have questions on registering with the state. Connect dots. Once a business is established. Owners live outside of the area - taxation without representation helps owners have a voice in the town. Small Biz resource central – like concierge and send in the right direction. Sit in two different counties – so they can navigate those factors.

Work together – knowing who does what. Connect with one of us and we can take it from there and share resources. We all know what each other does. Guide through the process of best resources.

- What are the challenges people are facing with self-employment? (even when covid is not a factor – is it funding? Is it securing a space? Is it housing?)

Il of those things – there are many dynamics behind that. It becomes a challenge to put together a one-pager for everything because everyone has different circumstances. Different challenges with varying types of businesses – health care, childcare, It mimics challenges of being in the Valley.

A commercial version of affordable housing. A steady stream of income and then realize it's seasonal here. It's many things, not just one thing. Paperwork is the hardest thing that is common in the beginning. Not unique to RFV, and challenges are common everywhere. But we have a high cost of living.

- What data can you share regarding interest in self-employment and the occupation they may or may not have taken on?

Self-employment is not a typical term used for business – sole proprietor or startup. The trend is growing, and we are seeing more people than ever, but we do not have hard data. Quadrupled – SBDC has gotten a lot of exposure through the pandemic.

From pandemic, they've started to reignite an idea, make a side hustle something bigger; They need to do something to survive. States changes of employee vs. IC have required people to be more formalized in being a 1099.

Self-employment vs. startup – people would prefer to work for an established organization. Financial and health insurance are needed right now.

- How can we create inclusivity in self-employment opportunities of minorities?

SBDC works in a team with the state – everyone is trying to tackle this problem right now. There is a huge opportunity right now, and this is something we need to have a focus on – it's crucial. Not just put in Spanish but also recognize how people do business more directly – my best friend, my cousin – more about connections. DEI Having people at the time with that perspective. Put the lens on to address those problems.

- Is there an opportunity or way to match interested people with a need in the valley?

SBDC – organizations are working on that type of idea. A program that we are trying to build out. Our local government and non-profit - child care and aging pop – are happening with the agencies but not funneling down to community members or entrepreneurs, so we need that connector. We are creating awareness of how to start a business with the target community's needs.

- Is opening a small business or becoming an entrepreneur a reasonable goal for someone in 2021?

Yes, do your research, know your market, have a plan to find the need. Capitalizing on the opportunity right now or longevity. People have time now, and they are creating their pet projects. It's going to be more than starting your own business - being a business and making it on your own.

- How can the community support small businesses through 2021?

Everyone has a different role. Average by shopping local; Erin needs help with sharing the word about SBDC services – do not hire an expensive contractor without having a conversation with them. The common statement "I wish I would have known about you sooner or called you sooner" and SBDC needs help with funding – small grants and otherwise by donations. With more funding, then we can get out more.

Little things add up – shop local, dine local, write a review, recognize that we are all interconnecting – it's your kids' soccer coach, volunteer firefighter, don't shop on Amazon as much.

Membership reductions have been tied to ski passes – members opted out as the big reason for membership is ski pass.

### **Sarah Reynolds Lasser, Aspen Chamber of Commerce, Senior Director of Business development**

Summary: Sarah acknowledged that there is a lot of opportunity and need for small business growth in the Valley but did not indicate that it is a focus of the Aspen Chamber of Commerce. She noted that while the area is supported mostly by hospitality indirectly or directly, the door is not closed for other businesses to thrive.

- From the Chamber's perspective, is there an unemployment issue in the valley right now? If so, why? Do you have any data to support this?

We do not have hard numbers, but we are aware of unemployment issues locally. However, we have heard from hotels about not filling open positions at the same time. It is a double-edged sword. We are seeing unemployment due to COVID, specifically at restaurants that have closed. Hours are reduced and/or positions eliminated. There are also positions that are going unfilled for long durations of time, beginning from even before the pandemic. Workforce Colorado can offer hard data for unemployment rates if needed.

- Is there an increase in activity for small business startups or new entrepreneurs?

A focus on small business growth was on the radar a few years ago, but lately, the Chamber has been focused on COVID response and business recovery. Some businesses are doing great, but some are hurting. We are looking forward to a summer and fall rebound. Unfortunately, the Chamber is not focused on entrepreneurs right now but will soon be starting a LEEDs group to start this discussion. Right now, there is little to no additional effort to support small businesses more than what we usually do. With that said, the Chamber has seen an impact of new residents who have left urban areas seeking these opportunities, but a formal recognition of this has not yet come into play. The Chamber has seen success in the digital marketing industry as one example of small business growth. Digital Nomad and remote work are big targets for expanding this growth. One big challenge for businesses is affordable leasable space.

The Chamber is hosting a business outlook forum in April. Part of this meeting will review real estate sales and how that will impact the local area. This reminds me that one vital business growth area is anything that services all of these new homeowners.

- In what sectors/industries are there opportunities for new startups or entrepreneurship?

Something that comes to mind: proposal approved for a shared workspace incubator in the power plant building. David Cook from Aspen daily news also thought about a brewery in that area.

- What resources are available to entrepreneurs through the chamber or otherwise to assist with their growth?

When you join the Chamber, you are engaging in the business community. You will receive natural connections through membership programs and engagement opportunities. Networking events, annual events, LEEDs group connections, etc., are all possibilities through the Chamber. Refer to the website for more detail.

### **Glenwood Springs Workforce Center**

The woman we spoke with stated that they do not deal with entrepreneurship there. Their main functions are to help job seekers find gainful employment, help with job searches, help fill out applications and provide resume review services. People who are receiving unemployment benefits are required to register with their local workforce center. The workforce center in Glenwood Springs is the branch that serves all of the Roaring Fork Valley. She stated that they are the main resource for people who are unemployed in the Valley. She again stated that they rarely work with people to support entrepreneurship. She also said that while she cannot give any specifics, she has seen a drastic increase in unemployed people since the start of the pandemic.

She recommended that we reach out to the Small Business Development Center, Coventure, and Evan Zislis.

### **State of Colorado Labor Statistics**

<https://www.colmigateway.com/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/Dec20PR.pdf>

According to the survey of households, Colorado's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased in December to 8.4 percent. The national unemployment rate was unchanged from November at 6.7percent.

Colorado's labor force grew by 42,400 in December to 3,212,600. The labor force participation rate increased by eight-tenths of a percentage point to 69.0percent. Since February, the share of Coloradans participating in the labor force reached its highest level when it was 69.4 percent.

The number of individuals employed in Colorado decreased by 24,400in December To 2,943,400, which represents 63.3percent of the state's 16+ population. Colorado's employment-to-population ratio is relatively flat since September.

<b>LABOR FORCE DATA (VALUES IN THOUSANDS)</b>					
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED:				Change from last:	
	Dec-20	Nov-20	Dec-19	Month	Year
Total Civilian Labor Force	3,212.6	3,170.2	3,174.5	42.4	38.1
Unemployment	269.2	202.3	80.3	66.8	188.8
Unemployment Rate (%)	8.4	6.4	2.5	2.0	5.9
Employment	2,943.4	2,967.8	3,094.2	-24.4	-150.7

<b>WAGE AND SALARY EMPLOYMENT DATA (VALUES IN THOUSANDS)</b>					
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED:				Change from last:	
	Dec-20	Nov-20	Dec-19	Month	Year
Mining & Logging	24.3	24.8	27.9	-0.5	-3.6
Construction	173.3	172.3	181.1	1.0	-7.8
Manufacturing	152.1	153.0	150.1	-0.9	2.0
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	485.3	475.1	484.1	10.2	1.2
Information	72.7	72.9	75.8	-0.2	-3.1
Financial Activities	172.4	172.6	173.7	-0.2	-1.3
Professional & Business Services	456.3	451.2	447.6	5.1	8.7
Educational & Health Services	337.6	336.5	354.3	1.1	-16.7
Leisure & Hospitality	254.9	291.0	346.4	-36.1	-91.5
Other Services	105.2	105.3	113.2	-0.1	-8.0
Government	428.5	428.2	459.3	0.3	-30.8
TOTAL NONAG	2,662.6	2,682.9	2,813.5	-20.3	-150.9
Labor Disputants	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

<b>Not Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force</b>								
	December 2020				December 2019			
	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Rate	Labor force	Employment	Unemployment	Rate
Pitkin	11,219	10,239	980	8.7	11,629	11,300	329	2.8



## Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject

Change Output Options:

From: 2020 ▾ To: 2020 ▾ [GO](#)

include graphs  include annual averages

[More Formatting Options](#)

Data extracted on: March 12, 2021 (2:02:46 PM)

### State and Area Employment, Hours, and Earnings

Series Id: SMS08000007000000001

Seasonally Adjusted

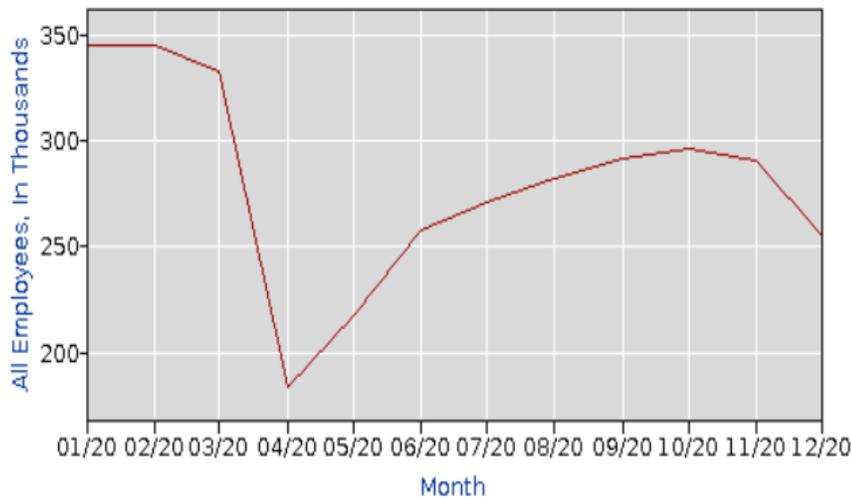
State: Colorado

Area: Statewide

Supersector: Leisure and Hospitality

Industry: Leisure and Hospitality

Data Type: All Employees, In Thousands



**Colorado**

Data Series	Back Data	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020
<b>Labor Force Data</b>							
Civilian Labor Force <sup>(1)</sup>		(R) 3,070.6	(R) 3,105.8	(R) 3,133.3	(R) 3,153.5	(R) 3,166.5	(R) 3,176.6
Employment <sup>(1)</sup>		(R) 2,844.3	(R) 2,884.1	(R) 2,914.4	(R) 2,935.6	(R) 2,947.9	(R) 2,957.3
Unemployment <sup>(1)</sup>		(R) 226.3	(R) 221.8	(R) 218.9	(R) 217.9	(R) 218.6	(R) 219.3
Unemployment Rate <sup>(2)</sup>		(R) 7.4	(R) 7.1	(R) 7.0	(R) 6.9	(R) 6.9	(R) 6.9
<b>Nonfarm Wage and Salary Employment</b>							
Total Nonfarm <sup>(3)</sup>		2,612.7	2,651.8	2,667.0	2,687.6	2,682.9	(P) 2,662.6
12-month % change		-6.4	-5.2	-4.7	-4.0	-4.5	(P) -5.4
Mining and Logging <sup>(3)</sup>		23.7	23.2	23.9	24.6	24.8	(P) 24.3
12-month % change		-18.6	-20.0	-16.1	-12.8	-11.7	(P) -12.9
Construction <sup>(3)</sup>		173.3	172.8	171.1	172.5	172.3	(P) 173.3
12-month % change		-3.6	-4.1	-5.1	-3.4	-4.1	(P) -4.3
Manufacturing <sup>(3)</sup>		150.4	151.2	152.3	153.0	153.0	(P) 152.1
12-month % change		0.1	0.7	1.3	2.1	2.3	(P) 1.3
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities <sup>(3)</sup>		453.7	459.7	467.1	473.3	475.1	(P) 485.3
12-month % change		-4.9	-3.8	-2.3	-1.3	-1.5	(P) 0.2
Information <sup>(3)</sup>		72.5	73.0	73.0	72.6	72.9	(P) 72.7
12-month % change		-4.6	-4.1	-4.5	-4.8	-4.1	(P) -4.1
Financial Activities <sup>(3)</sup>		169.0	169.4	171.3	174.3	172.6	(P) 172.4
12-month % change		-2.6	-2.8	-1.8	-0.2	-1.5	(P) -0.7
Professional & Business Services <sup>(3)</sup>		441.1	445.3	445.6	446.6	451.2	(P) 456.3
12-month % change		-0.1	0.5	0.3	0.6	1.0	(P) 1.9
Education & Health Services <sup>(3)</sup>		331.0	337.7	338.3	340.0	336.5	(P) 337.6
12-month % change		-4.6	-3.0	-2.8	-2.6	-4.2	(P) -4.7
Leisure & Hospitality <sup>(3)</sup>		270.9	282.7	291.6	296.5	291.0	(P) 254.9
12-month % change		-21.8	-18.6	-16.0	-14.5	-16.1	(P) -26.4
Other Services <sup>(3)</sup>		103.2	102.8	104.8	104.8	105.3	(P) 105.2
12-month % change		-9.1	-9.5	-7.7	-8.5	-7.9	(P) -7.1
Government <sup>(3)</sup>		423.9	434.0	428.0	429.4	428.2	(P) 428.5
12-month % change		-7.3	-5.2	-6.6	-6.3	-6.7	(P) -6.7

## Local Resources

### **Jonathan Feldman, Alpine Bank**

Summary: Jonathan's advice to would-be entrepreneurs, from a banker, perspective, is to start small and move slowly. Too often, he says, entrepreneurs approach Alpine Bank for business loans but don't have a decent "business track record" for the bank to base their financial decisions on. Banks, he says, do not want to loan money to a high-risk investment. They like sure things. His advice for small business owners is to try to save money on their own, or borrow money from family, then run a smaller version of the business than they dream of and establish a sound financial "track record" for 1-2 years before approaching a bank or credit union about a business loan. Jonathan also told me that one of the most essential things a would-be entrepreneur can do is get their personal finances in order. Pay your bills on time, including credit cards; establish good credit and have good references. If you don't have a business already, the banks need to look at your personal financial situation to see if you are a good candidate for a loan or are a potential risk.

### **Steve Skadron, Colorado Mountain College, Dean of Aspen-Carbondale**

Overall, Steve was very excited about the state of entrepreneurship in the Valley; he's got a project in the works himself on the issue. Steve gave a great view of where the Valley is on unemployment, mainly from an upvalley perspective, and how he does not feel it is a prevalent issue here.

- Do you see unemployment as a problem in our valley?

Locally he's not confronted with it at all. In his political involvement, he understands and sees the impacts; just look at the newspaper letters about restaurant work. On the other hand, at CMC, they are doing something about it; They are leading the education of a new sector of 'older students' who spent their lives in culinary and hospitality are now moving into business and nursing / EMT fields.

- How do you see entrepreneurs and small business owners as a solution to that?

It's critical that we have supported entrepreneurialism; large corporations aren't a fit for our people or our Valley; Steve's vision is moving towards a "makers economy." Steve is creating a program called "make it here," utilizing the uphill economy initiative to capture the uphill culture and mountain roots. This idea embodies the circular economy initiative and small footprint (wear, repair, and repeat). Exploring small-scale manufacturing feasibility - like Melanzana - take the program and learn about small-scale manufacturing, rural economic development, and entrepreneurship.

Big wrap is one of the biggest success stories in the valley, embodying the ideal of entrepreneurialism.

- What is the industry in our valley with the greatest opportunity for growth and new businesses?

The outdoor rec industry should grow, and Steve believes in preserving the local values - rooted in mountain ethics. On a state level, Hickenlooper - started the outdoor recreation department.

- Are you seeing any interest from within the community to start small businesses?

Very much so, CMC has had success in Steamboat with hardgoods - ski and snowboard business. In Leadville, they have the snow science field covered. Aspen and Carbondale could go in the direction of a soft good; Steve's program perfectly fits this role.

- What are current students studying? Do you see students from the CMC business program starting their own businesses?

It's evolving towards business classes, and being virtual is aiding in the movement. Good example: there is a graduate of the Steamboat spring shop who now makes skis. He's got a dynamic, growing company that is especially big in Japan and attends OR shows.

- What do you see as an effective way to influence the emergence of startups and small businesses?

As a community - we can offer educational tools to help people, making sure they have the knowledge to step into the role and somewhere to go to ask questions.

COVID relief - CMC was recognized nationally, out together with an emergency response package - all free last summer. If you are a business and you need expert help - they are connecting aid to small businesses. Spanish speaking assistance as well.

### **Mike Lowe, Coventure, Executive Director**

Speaking with Paige was exciting but did not offer much insight into where the Valley stands with unemployment. She said 'there is a pulse' for Bonedale Business Academy and what it has to offer but did not elaborate on that.

- What is your affiliation/working history with Bonedale Business Academy?

Working with Evan on marketing, if Bonedale Business Academy took off, she would do the marketing for him; she also hosted a workshop with him about marketing for Bonedale Business Academy.

- What is the biggest way Coventure differs from Bonedale Business Academy?

Both are brainchildren of Evan to some extent, mission and vision for CoVenture came from Evan. Coventure has since moved toward hooking up established businesses with investors. Evan is most interested in entrepreneurs on the ground level and helps them work through ideas - them paying for education and support (this creates other opportunities for entrepreneurs as they teach and earn money/business that way).

Last six months at Coventure, they have recognized the need for tactical support (especially with covid), so they are shifting their focus to help entrepreneurs; they are working to help businesses figure out PPE loans. This venture has not been profitable for them, so they are shifting their focus to encompass some of that.

CoVenture has 3 Parts right now: Accelerator program, free programming, consulting network.

- Do you know if there is interest in bringing back the Bonedale Business Academy?

There is a need to bring back the program; CoVenture is not structured to host paid events regularly.

- What do you see as the easiest way for an entrepreneur to "get into" the roaring fork valley community as a successful entrepreneur?

Coventure is trying to fill the need to connect locally; chambers are resources, Aspen Business Connect is great for connections from Aspen to Carbondale.

- What do you see as the sector where the most growth for entrepreneurs in our valley is?

The answer to this was solely about BBA. There is a pulse around giving a place for this kind of training and aid outside the public sector because it's good for "both sides," so to speak. People are invested enough to pay for the training and the people giving the training get paid and potential business after that.

- What is Co Venture doing to reach out to new entrepreneurs?

It is offering free content online, such as podcasts and informational sessions. The funding component is challenging for small businesses and entrepreneurs right now in covid, and there isn't much clarity to it all right now. On the marketing side, it's a new standard for consumers - being online - and there is a sentiment that this will not go away soon.

Paige also added that people are sitting on money right now and not spending - there's going to be money to spend when COVID starts to lift.

### **Tamara Tomorhlen, Aspen Community Foundation, Executive Director**

Aspen Community Foundation was formed 40 years ago by Aspen Skiing Company, so there wasn't a lot she could answer for me; I asked her other questions that she was unable to answer.

- How can the community support small businesses through 2021?

Shopping (patronizing), utilizing services, buying their products; may be easier to order online, but we should all make an effort to shop local.

- What key factors might help you start up a small business?

Organization and knowledge and understanding what you are getting into; scenario planning, predicting what may occur or what trends might be

- What occurred during the process of the concept (business plan) of Aspen Community Foundation to completion?

It started small, many discussions, a lot of what will it take; wouldn't underestimate the planning.

- What usually prevents someone from engaging in self-employment?

There can be a lot more risk factors; you are responsible for everything; you don't have to report for anything or to anyone; deal with your benefits; you don't have a specific salary; there is a lot more to think about, greater responsibility.

- What kind of business would, or wouldn't I want to start here?

Businesses that aren't relevant or where there wouldn't be sufficient demand shouldn't open. On the other hand, identifying unmet demand might be the key to a thriving business.

## Resources

As we can see, being an entrepreneur presents a host of challenges. There are many resources available to those wishing to explore the role of being an entrepreneur or expand their existing business. Whether you're starting out freelancing in your spare time or you have a thriving business, and you're looking to expand, there are resources that can help you along the entrepreneurial process. These sites are a great starting point:

### Colorado Small Business Development Center

<https://www.coloradosbdc.org/>

CoVenture is based out of Carbondale, Colorado, and offers community meeting rooms, rentable office space, educational webinars, and podcasts, as well as consulting services. They focus on the growth of an existing business by offering a platform for local entrepreneurs to obtain funding and support. They offer a community business center, available to members, which not only provides a place to work but also an opportunity to connect with other entrepreneurs. The connections created in a co-working environment lead to a supportive community and networking experiences that are not available in a virtual work environment.

### CoVenture

<https://www.coventure.io/>

CoVenture is based out of Carbondale, Colorado and offers community meeting rooms, rentable office space, educational webinars and podcasts as well as consulting services. They focus on the growth of an existing business by offering a platform for local entrepreneurs to obtain funding and support. They offer a community business center, available to members, which not only provides a place to work but also an opportunity to connect with other entrepreneurs. The connections created in a co working environment lead to a supportive community and networking experiences which are not available in a virtual work environment.

## Local Chambers of Commerce

There are chambers of commerce located in the following towns: Aspen (<https://aspenchamber.org/>), Basalt (<https://www.basaltchamber.org/>), Carbondale (<https://www.carbondale.com/>), Glenwood Springs (<https://glenwoodchamber.com/>) and Rifle (<https://westerngarcochamber.com/>). Each Chamber provides an insight into the local economy; becoming a member of a local chamber of commerce brings the benefits of resources for small and growing businesses, notably word of mouth recommendations and networking opportunities. Each Chamber is connected with the community it's based in and creates a network of entrepreneurs designed to promote its members' interests and direction. This is done through various channels, including allowing entrepreneurs to gain a voice and platform in local government, driving the direction of the entrepreneurs' place in the community.

## Business Plans

Links to free one page business plans for to-be entrepreneurs

- <https://leanstack.com/leancanvas#:~:text=The%20Lean%20Canvas,a%20single%20page%20business%20model>
- <https://www.strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas>

Plenty of potential entrepreneurs have great business ideas but are held back in the pursuit of their goals by barriers: knowledge and resources kept out of reach of all but a few. While it's understood that starting your own business is a tough road — particularly in the age of COVID, where many small businesses are struggling to stay afloat — it's to the betterment of all that more people should have the tools available to them to try their hand at a startup. There are many other resources available, but the ones listed above offer a great starting place.

## Conclusion

The Valley draws people to it as a great place to live and work but is the Valley a good place to build your own business from the ground up? This group of local leaders sought to answer this question and learn more about what it takes to become an entrepreneur in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Our research began with a simple question: is it a viable option to start your own business in the Roaring Fork Valley? After speaking to established small business owners, Chambers of commerce, university leaders, business support agencies, and even a banker, we found an answer. Yes, it is an option to start your own business here, but it won't be easy. You'll face numerous challenges which you'll hear about from any small business owner in the country. However, the Valley presents more unique challenges to an entrepreneur, including high housing and property costs, a shallow and recreation-focused labor force, and a market inherently centered on tourism, hospitality, retail, and construction/property maintenance services. All of this is to say that the Valley may not be the most economically ideal place to start your business, but with the right mindset and a relentless desire to succeed, anything is possible.

In conclusion, we have found that resolving near-term economic recovery and long term economic resilience through entrepreneurship is only one of many solutions available to the community. Entrepreneurialism can be a viable mechanism to achieve sustained financial independence but requires an alignment of ideals, resources, and drive that if achieved, can not only provide a solution to an individual, but an entire community. We hope that our assessment and compilation of resources for entrepreneurialism in the Roaring Fork Valley can point to next steps for you, whether it be a regional convening of stakeholders gathering to form a think tank or an inspiration to embody a lifestyle of entrepreneurialism growing your brain child into a valley wide industry. Regardless, the Valley thirsts for your creativity!

Best of Luck!

Team Four Score.