

Living and Serving in Southern Colorado!

Important stuff! Please read!

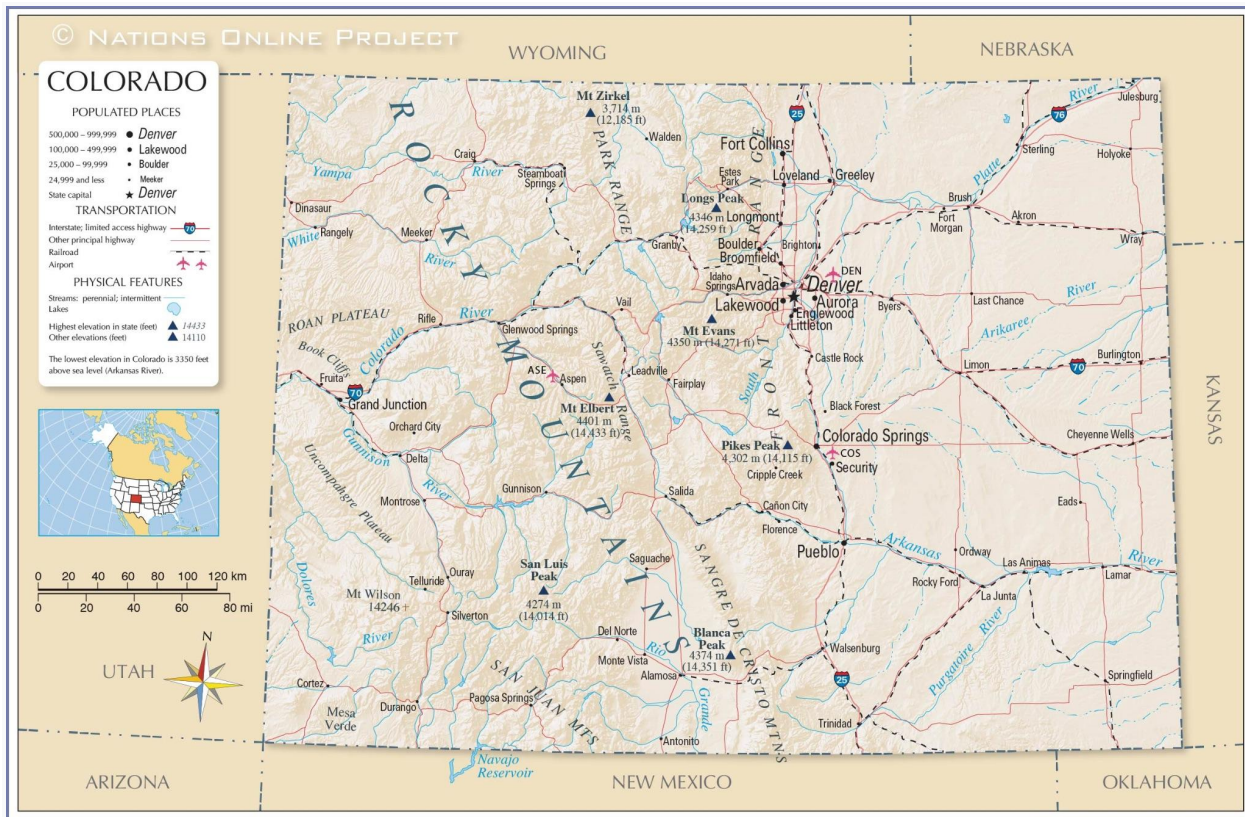
When you think of serving in AmeriCorps, you may imagine the type of work you will be doing, the kids you'll be working with, the professional and personal growth you'll experience, etc. We'd like to encourage you to also put some thought into the place you will be living for a year. Oftentimes when people think of Colorado, they think of Denver, ski resorts, and little mountain towns nestled at the base of snow-capped peaks. South Central Colorado is quite different from the rest of the state, and AAI operates in its two largest valleys: the San Luis Valley and the Arkansas River Valley.



The San Luis Valley (SLV) is a wide-open alpine valley, 65 miles wide by 100 miles long, with its lowest points around 7500 feet above sea level. Compare that to the “Mile High City” of Denver at 5,280 feet! And while there are certainly many snow-capped peaks to climb, the region also contains canyons, rivers, and pine forests.

The SLV economy is primarily based on agriculture, so there are lots of farms and ranches. The important part to understand is that the SLV is truly very rural. In other parts of the country, that might mean living next to rolling farmland with some horses, while still being able to drive to the nearest metropolitan area in 30 minutes or so. This is NOT what rural Colorado is like. For example, there is no public transportation here, there are no Target stores (gasp!), and nightlife is very limited.

Also, in order to reach urban amenities, you will need to drive two to four hours, and you will generally need to drive over one or more mountain passes to get there—tricky during the winter months. This means you may not always be able to go where you'd like due to weather restrictions.



The towns of Saguache, Alamosa, and Monte Vista are found in the south central portion of the map above (at fewer than 300 people, Creede is too tiny to appear on this map, but it is located northwest of the towns of Del Norte and South Fork). These are the four towns in the SLV served by AAI.

The Arkansas River Valley (so named because the Arkansas River begins here) is just north of the SLV. AAI serves the towns Salida, Poncha Springs (a small town just west of Salida), and Cañon City. At just under 18,000 people, Cañon City is the largest in the area we serve.



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The economies in these towns are based more on tourism and outdoor recreation (biking, rafting, and hiking), but the area also employs people in its federal correctional facilities (prisons): three in the Lower Arkansas Valley near Cañon City, and one more in the Upper Arkansas Valley near Buena Vista. Along with economic and resource limitations, the South-Central Colorado area can also be lacking in racial diversity. Many of the communities we serve have a strong Latinx presence—especially Alamosa and Monte Vista—but other racial groups have very little representation. Some towns, such as Salida are, frankly, very white. Politically, some towns are on the more conservative side, and others, not so much. Farmers, migrant farm workers,

ranchers, retired executives, old hippies, and folks who work for government agencies (such as the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service) all live here in loosely defined localities that occasionally overlap.



We say all this because we want to be very clear and upfront about what it might feel like to live in these towns if you come from a more cosmopolitan area. Some AmeriCorps members describe serving here like moving to a different country—with all the excitement and challenges that might bring!

As an organization, we are very committed to bringing AmeriCorps members to this area who reflect the diverse lived experience of the broader country. We feel the best way to serve kids is for them to see themselves represented in the folks they learn from, as well as to see beyond themselves in the people they learn from. We are also very committed to our members' safety and positive experience, and we would absolutely have your back if anything in our communities felt unsafe. However, negative experiences can happen, too. We want to be real, to open a dialogue, and invite you to explore this topic more if you'd like.

Even so, this can be a beautiful, magical, place to live. Living a rural life is a chance to slow down, connect with people and the environment more deeply, gaze at the spectacular array of



stars, engage in or learn a new outdoor activity, and learn about a very unique part of our country.

To learn more about our communities, feel free to check out some of the links below:

Alamosa

Wikipedia article on [Alamosa](#)
[Alamosa School District](#)
[Alamosa Town Website](#)
[Boys and Girls Club of the San Luis Valley](#)

Creede

Wikipedia article on [Creede](#)
[Creede Parks and Rec](#)
[Creede Town Website](#)
Creede [Public Health Website](#)

Cañon City

Wikipedia article on [Cañon City](#)
[Cañon City Schools](#)
[Cañon City Official Website](#)

Monte Vista

Wikipedia article on [Monte Vista](#)
[Monte Vista School District](#)
[City of Monte Vista Website](#)

Poncha Springs

Wikipedia article on [Poncha Springs](#)
[Poncha Springs Town Website](#)
[The Schoolhouse at Poncha Springs](#)

Saguache

Wikipedia article on [Saguache](#)
[Saguache County Website](#)
[Mountain Valley School District](#)

Salida

Wikipedia article on [Salida](#)
[Salida School District](#)
[City of Salida Website](#)