

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

✦ GRANT AWARD

\$494K Awarded to Community Connections and Center for Rural AI

OCTOBER 8, 2026 · DURANGO, COLORADO

Community Connections will use the OpenAI Foundation award to cut administrative burden in disability services, with CRAI as technical partner.

IN PARTNERSHIP



Community Connections



Center for **Rural AI**

Community Connections has been awarded a \$494,000 grant from the OpenAI Foundation's 2026 People-First AI Fund to explore how artificial intelligence can reduce administrative burden and improve access to disability services in Southwest Colorado. The Center for Rural AI (CRAI) helped identify the funding opportunity using its Grant Writing Assistant and will serve as technical partner throughout the initiative. The award is one of 163 selected from nearly 1,700 applicants across 35 states.

The funding will help streamline the administrative work that pulls caseworkers away from the people they serve. Community Connections is the state-designated Medicaid case management agency for Southwest Colorado, and its staff navigate multiple disconnected government systems with time-consuming reporting requirements. The grant will support efforts to connect those systems, automate routine tasks, and reduce repetitive documentation.

All solutions developed through the partnership will be made publicly available for other rural nonprofits and case management agencies to adopt.

"Rural communities have always had to do more with less. This is an opportunity to build practical tools that start with Community Connections and extend to rural nonprofits across the region. We're focused on finding solutions where AI can genuinely reduce the burden on people doing hard, important work."

ABOUT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Founded in 1985, Community Connections is a Southwest Colorado nonprofit serving more than 1,500 people each year across Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan counties. As the state-designated Medicaid Case Management Agency for the region, Community Connections helps people with disabilities and complex needs access long-term care benefits and coordinate services. Its programs include Early Intervention, Family Support Services, and Southwest Colorado Cares, a regional Community Care Hub. Learn more at communityconnectionsco.org.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AI

The Center for Rural AI is a fiscally sponsored project of SW Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3), based in Durango, Colorado. CRAI helps rural communities, institutions, and businesses build practical AI capacity through hands-on training, real-world pilots, and open playbooks. Learn more at ruralai.org.

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