

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Empowerment Center Improvements Category J - Small Projects



The City and County of Denver's Youth Empowerment Center serves as a vital resource for youth, families, and community members in one of Denver's busiest service areas. As demand for youth programs increased, the existing 9,940-square-foot facility faced challenges with space utilization, accessibility, operational efficiency, and aging building systems. The City needed a solution that improved functionality and flexibility while avoiding building an exterior expansion and minimizing disruption to ongoing community services.

Huitt-Zollars, serving as Architect and Engineer of Record, led a comprehensive renovation that transformed the facility into a more flexible, accessible, and sustainable community asset. The multidisciplinary team evaluated the building's structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems to maximize long-term value and extend the facility's lifespan. Improvements included modernized building systems, accessibility upgrades, fire protection and HVAC enhancements, and interior expansion to better support staff and users.

A key project feature was converting an existing double-height atrium into a new second-level, 1,140-SF workspace with offices, a conference room, and collaborative areas. This required designing and integrating a new structural floor system within the existing building while preserving major architectural elements. The team used LiDAR scanning and reality-capture technology to accurately document existing conditions and support complex structural analysis. During construction, previously undocumented structural conditions required rapid engineering evaluation and redesign to maintain the schedule.

Keeping the facility operational throughout construction added another layer of complexity. Huitt-Zollars collaborated closely with City staff, stakeholders, and end users to coordinate phased construction and maintain uninterrupted community access. User engagement helped shape a design that balanced administrative needs with youth programming, resulting in increased usable space and improved functionality.

Beyond the physical improvements, the project delivers lasting community benefits. The renovated facility supports youth development, recreation, mentorship, and community engagement while incorporating all-gender restrooms, accessibility enhancements, and energy-efficient upgrades that meet Denver's green building requirements. These improvements created a safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable environment.

Substantially completed on May 4, 2026, the project was delivered on schedule and under budget, generating cost savings that could be returned to the City for other priorities. Through innovative engineering, collaborative planning, and strategic renovation, the Youth Empowerment Center Improvements project demonstrates how thoughtful design can extend the life of public infrastructure while strengthening the communities it serves.