



WESTMARC Becomes a Host for the International Economic Development Council Economy Recovery Corps' Inaugural Cohort

Glendale, Arizona (February 9, 2024) – WESTMARC is excited to officially be part of the first cohort of Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) fellows and host communities. Launched in 2023 through a \$30 million cooperative agreement between the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, ERC is designed to build capacity in some of the hardest-hit and most economically distressed areas across the United States while cultivating the next generation of economic development leaders.

“WESTMARC welcomes Fellow, Luciano Oviedo, to the West Valley. Luciano will leverage his vast experience and skills to work with our regional industries, education, and municipal stakeholders,” Kimberly Jordan, WESTMARC Executive Vice President said.

“Throughout this collaborative, regional project, partners will identify opportunities to leverage AI and other technologies to solve for workforce challenges, identify opportunities to upskill our current workforce, and increase digital literacy and technology adoption. This work will further position the West Valley as a tech-forward, innovative region, and position our regional talent and key industries for maximum success. This work will lay the foundation for methods and best practices that may be leveraged and scaled in other regions on the national level.”

This month, 65 Fellows commence their two-and-a-half-year field placements with host organizations across the nation. Fellows will spearhead catalytic projects that advance new ways of doing economic development to build more resilient, inclusive, and equitable economies.

“WESTMARC is implementing West Valley Pipeline 2.0 workforce development strategy, which is focused on developing talent in key industries that the region is attracting,” Sintra Hoffman, WESTMARC President and CEO said.

“Technology is integrated in everything we do, from managing our households to managing large corporations. Luciano's work will assist with the workforce crisis as he identifies opportunities to utilize technology and aid the success of businesses.”

“I am super excited to collaborate with WESTMARC to tackle the wicked yet counter-intuitive problem of - how might we harness rapidly evolving AI technologies to empower people across all life stages and industries to (re)learn and (re)develop the skills, education and training needed to thrive in the new world of AI?” Luciano Oviedo said.

“My focus will be on engaging with public/private partners to iterate on co-developing novel action research, education and learning technologies and solutions. I am especially excited about architecting our efforts to deliver a scalable blueprint so other communities across the USA may adapt and benefit from insights and solutions.”

The 65 selected Host projects are located across 44 states and territories and represent an exciting cross-section of rural, urban, and tribal communities. Of the 65 Host sites, 62 percent are rural, 23 percent are mixed (urban, suburban, and rural), and 15 percent are urban. Hosts reflect the entire community and economic development field spectrum, from city and county government to regional coalitions, economic development organizations, economic development districts, and entrepreneurial support organizations. Nine of the 65 projects are led by Tribes or involve a Tribal organization as a primary partner. The host sites and project needs represent the interconnectedness that economic development has with pressing needs in communities of all sizes, including workforce development, entrepreneurial ecosystem building, housing and childcare, climate resiliency, broadband, access to capital, and more. Each project receives a dedicated Fellow, fully funded for 2.5 years, who will act as a field catalyst to greater build, strengthen, and coordinate relationships and local efforts alongside their host community.

“The Economic Recovery Corps program is unique on many levels,” added Nicole Manapol, ERC Senior Program Director at IEDC and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. “To balance the immediate needs of a community with longer term capacity needs, we intentionally recruited seasoned practitioners who could add instant value to their host community. We also recruited candidates from diverse backgrounds and sectors, with an emphasis on identifying local talent or those with lived experiences that reflect the cultural context of the 65 host communities. Collectively, these efforts will help to diversify the economic development field with new types of practitioners while cultivating talent in host geographies to sustain momentum beyond the 30-month fellowship.”

IEDC received more than 500 applications from potential host organizations and over 1,400 Fellow applications from June through August and conducted thousands of hours of interviews alongside ERC program partners between July and November to select the final cohort of 65 fellows and hosts. Sixty-nine percent of the fellows are women, and 54 percent identify as people of color. Fellows come with significant professional experience (6-15+ years) across a variety of sectors including planning, entrepreneurship, community and economic development, public administration, marketing, rural development, and more.

“ERC is more than a fellowship; it is a testament to the power of collaboration and strategic partnerships deeply needed to produce lasting social and economic impact. By joining forces with national partners, host organizations, funders, and practitioners eager for new models and practices, ERC will build capacity in places of need while supporting the next generation of economic development leaders all while driving more equitable economic outcomes,” said Nathan Ohle, President & CEO of IEDC. “By investing in capacity building and leadership development, facilitating knowledge sharing and partnerships, the ERC program will set the stage for the future of economic development and a new age of collaboration in the economic development field.”

IEDC is joined by six other partner organizations including the Center on Rural Innovation, International City/County Management Association, National Association of Counties Research Foundation, National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation, National League of Cities Institute, and RAIN Catalysts. The ERC partner coalition will lend their expertise and coaching to fellow and host participants, and impart lessons learned and research from ERC to the economic development community at large.

Fellows will commence their 30-month ERC Fellowship this month after convening in Portland, Oregon on February 12-15, 2024, and will conclude the fellowship in summer of 2026.

Meet the inspiring cohort of 65 fellows and explore the impactful projects unique to each host community by visiting www.economicrecoverycorps.org.

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About WESTMARC:

WESTMARC—the Western Maricopa Coalition—is a public-private partnership of the 15 communities, the business community and the educational sector in the West Valley.

WESTMARC is committed to our members' success and to our mission of enhancing economic development and promoting quality of life in the West Valley.