



ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
COLLABORATIVE

EDC COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT 2023



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: PARTNERING FOR PROGRESS

The Economic Development Collaborative hosts the Small Business Development Center and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, a Grant from the California Office of the Small Business Advocate and by the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County.



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: *Partnering for progress*

Dear Partners, Stakeholders and Friends,

A look back at 2023 reinforces how our contribution to the region's economy is all about partnership. Our multi-county, cross-sectoral partnerships include a diversity of public and private stakeholders spanning local, state and federal levels. Each of them informs our capacity for building an economy that helps assure a broadly shared prosperity.

For a partial illustration of partnerships in 2023, we recall the following:

- Our newest initiative is serving as fiscal agent and co-convenor of Uplift Central Coast. Shaping an equitable recovery from COVID-19, this partnership draws us into dialogue with all manner of stakeholders across the Central Coast. That dialogue provides guidance to our management of a \$5 million state grant to develop a regional resilience plan. In early 2024, the plan will guide the distribution of several million dollars in program implementation funds for the region.
- Our Ventura County Digital Upskilling Training Program has moved intensively into training delivery and additional markets. Made possible by Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, this initiative includes partnerships with the Ventura County Adult Schools Consortium, Women's Economic Ventures and both national and local training organizations. Broadening our reach, we're now partnering with the City of Goleta to access funds to deliver training in Santa Barbara County.
- Our collaboration with the County of Ventura continues to evolve, including partnerships with the Museum of Ventura County, Pacific Coast Business Times and the Ventura County Community Foundation in support of the County's 150th Anniversary. Ventura County COVID-19 recovery resources fuel the outcomes of our advising and lending services, our FATHOMWERX Partnership, with commands at Navy Base Ventura County and the Port of Hueneme, and our partnership providing technical assistance to Early Child Education providers.
- Serving as fiscal agent and managing partner of the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast, we guided the development of the Santa Barbara County Broadband Strategic Plan and now partner with the County of Santa Barbara for implementation. We've also partnered with the Ventura County Council of Governments for developing a regional strategy in Ventura County.
- Finally, not least is our collaboration with the California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz):
 - The GO-Biz Office of the Small Business Advocate designated EDC as an Accelerate CA: Inclusive Innovation Hub providing \$1 million over four years to support technology-based firms and expanding opportunities for women and minority-owned businesses.
 - EDC was awarded \$940,000 to augment our federal U.S. Small Business Administration funding, helping to assure we maintain our high level of services as we recover from the pandemic.
 - Our lending programs and borrowers benefitted from nearly \$3 million in loan guarantees from the GO-Biz Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank.
 - In our role as the Ventura County Film Commission, we serve as an extension of the California Film Commission, also an office within GO-Biz.

As illustrated by these partnerships and continuing year over year, at EDC our purpose is defined—and our impact and outcomes enhanced—by collaboration. We look forward to continuing our mission in 2024, building on existing alliances and connecting with new partners.



Bruce Stenslie
EDC President/CEO

EDC SBDC SUCCESS STORY – SUMA



Owner Denice Wharton

A driven and ambitious entrepreneur, Denice Wharton recognized a critical reoccurring issue while working at her mother's local healthcare training program. Many individuals, particularly single mothers, immigrants and people with multiple jobs, face challenges maintaining their professional licenses after completing training. This issue often leads to a loss of employment and career setbacks. Leveraging her healthcare expertise and her mother's insights, Denice launched Suma in 2019, a revolutionary management platform that streamlines the licensing process for healthcare professionals.

Denice sought guidance and support from EDC throughout her entrepreneurial journey. She described, "The Small Business Administration and the EDC Small Business Development Center (SBDC) were a resource hub for me. Whenever I had a question, I would go to [their] website and find a workshop, event or a mentor."

EDC SBDC's team of expert advisors often work together to help entrepreneurs tackle challenges and the entire team was ready to help Denice each step of the way. Erick and Bryan Went, EDC SBDC technical specialists, worked with Denice to create her product, ensuring its long-lasting value for the community it serves. EDC SBDC Business Advisor Douglas Korte, a finance and management specialist, helped Denice refine her product. Denice praised the support she received from everyone at EDC, underscoring the importance of a strong support network in the entrepreneurial journey.

With a clear vision for the future, Denice aims to expand Suma statewide and later expand it nationwide, facilitating a smoother and more accessible licensing process. Suma is a testament to the positive change technology and entrepreneurship can bring to communities in need. With a passion for making a difference and a network of supportive mentors, Denice is making a lasting impact on the lives of countless professionals and the healthcare industry.

"The Small Business Administration and the Economic Development Collaborative Small Business Development Center were a resource hub for me. Whenever I had a question, I would go to [their] website and find a workshop, event or a mentor."

- Denice Wharton, EDC SBDC Client





Small Business Development Center

In 2023, EDC SBDC provided NO-COST consulting to a record-breaking 2,550 small businesses across Ventura, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Counties, EDC's highest client count to date. In addition, EDC SBDC consistently outperformed national census benchmarks, offering exceptional assistance to women, minority groups and other underserved entrepreneurs in Southern California.

As a leading member of the California Network of 49 SBDC service centers supporting 91 locations, EDC SBDC was:

- 1st in Capital Accessed for Women-Owned Firms
- 2nd in Capital Accessed for Hispanic-Owned Firms
- 2nd in Capital Accessed for African American-Owned Firms
- 4th in Capital Accessed for All Business Owners

Accessible consulting and capital for small businesses is essential for leveling the playing field, fostering growth, promoting innovation and building resilient and thriving communities. In partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration, EDC SBDC strives to match talented entrepreneurs with expert business advisors and make lasting positive impacts in the lives of every business owner, their employees and their families.

EDC SBDC 2023 IMPACT

2,550

Clients Served

11,882

Hours of Consulting

70

Start-Ups

500

Jobs Created

14,252

Jobs Supported

Over \$72M

In Capital Infusion

"What sets us apart from typical government-funded agencies is definitely our personal touch. We know it's so hard just to be in business. To see a business reach their milestone, get a business loan, hire additional employees, grow in marketing and get clients coming in is so rewarding."

Tiffany Hunsberger, EDC Loan Relationship Specialist

On June 6, 2023, EDC SBDC proudly received the prestigious President's "E" Award for Export Service for outstanding efforts in promoting export expansion. Established by President Kennedy in 1961, the "E" award serves as the highest form of recognition bestowed upon individuals or entities in the United States for contributions to the expansion of U.S. exports.

As the Los Angeles SBDC Network lead for international trade consulting across Ventura, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties, EDC SBDC helps local firms identify and take advantage of trade opportunities, develop a strategic approach to global markets and use global markets as a catalyst for innovation and growth.

EDC GGTP 2023 IMPACT

484
Clients Served

101
Grants Secured for Expansion
into International Markets

Over \$11M
In Capital Accessed

TRADE EXPANSION

A crucial export opportunity comes from the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) which offers financial assistance to small businesses seeking to expand into foreign markets. The program is administered by GO-Biz and funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. Serving as an extension of the state's capacity, EDC SBDC has become one of the most active and successful local economic development organizations in the state facilitating significant business access to the program.

TRADE MISSIONS

Trade missions are one of the key ways to foster international collaborations and today's digital capabilities have made trade missions increasingly cost-effective and accessible. In 2023, EDC SBDC hosted a virtual trade mission to Romania, focused on building aerospace and defense connections. With more than 500 attendees, the event was the largest virtual trade mission in the history of GO-Biz and the U.S. Commercial Service.



EDC SBDC SUCCESS STORY – GAMELAND



Owner Clinton Panton

Inspired by COVID-19's isolation, Clinton Panton embarked on a mission to create a source of connection and social cohesion in the face of widespread separation. Seeking guidance to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship, Clinton turned to EDC SBDC, where he discovered the CA Dream Fund Grant Program. The program, administered by the state and run locally by the Los Angeles SBDC Network, supported California entrepreneurs in launching their ventures by offering a start-up training program with online workshops and personalized advising. Participants who completed the program requirements were eligible for a one-time grant.

Thanks to the CA Dream Fund and Clinton's dedication, Gameland was created in 2021. Gameland is a mobile game business that provides comprehensive gaming equipment for events, creating a fun in-person experience that encourages connections. Throughout the process, Clinton received guidance from various EDC SBDC Business Advisors, including Sebastian De Vivo for start-up assistance, Erica Bristol for legal advice and Anthony Elliot

for financial consulting. Clinton expressed his appreciation for his EDC SBDC Business Advisor Luisa Arzate, stating that she saw "me from not having a website and just the idea in my head to getting together my prices and my marketing materials to prepare for what was to come next."

Reflecting on his support from EDC, Clinton emphasized, "The EDC cares about my successes, which is incredible, and they follow up. They are paying attention to their clientele and the people around us and their success. The caring part is the biggest to me." Looking towards the future, Clinton envisions expanding Gameland into a statewide business and ultimately transforming it into a nationwide franchise with the potential for global reach. His journey exemplifies the power of entrepreneurship, community support and the transformative impact of programs like the CA Dream Fund in turning dreams into successful ventures.

"The EDC cares about my successes, which is incredible, and they follow up. They are paying attention to their clientele and the people around us and their success. The caring part is the biggest to me."

-Clinton Panton, EDC SBDC Client



In 2023, EDC LOAN provided a record-breaking \$2.97 million in loans to small businesses across Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, EDC's highest lending amount to date. In addition, EDC LOAN launched two new loan funds, continuing to prioritize making low-interest lending available to businesses who have not been able to access traditional bank financing.

Low-interest lending opportunities designed for small businesses remain ever-critical. As traditional lending interest rates rise and disruptions demand innovation at every turn, EDC LOAN remains committed to supporting business owners before, during and after loan disbursement. As a steadfast partner for local entrepreneurs, EDC LOAN is proud to provide entrepreneurs with the financial resources needed to thrive, innovate, create jobs and contribute to their communities.

In addition, EDC LOAN:

- Launched a new \$1 million loan fund with the City of Simi Valley to support business owners recovering from the impacts of COVID-19.
- Launched a new \$1 million loan fund with the City of Atascadero, EDC's first lending option in San Luis Obispo County, helping restaurant owners install commercial kitchens.
- Continued to manage loan capital from Banc of California, N.A., City of Camarillo, City of Oxnard, City of Ventura, First Five Ventura County, Mechanics Bank and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.
- Managed contributions for loan loss reserves in support of lending from City National Bank, Bank of Southern California, First Citizens Bank and Union Bank.
- Secured loan loss guarantees up to 80% and collateral support through resource partnerships with the GO-Biz Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank and the California State Treasurer's Office's California Capital Access Program.



EDC LOAN 2023 IMPACT

Over \$3.50M
Available Loan Capital

Over \$2.97M
Loaned

"We want to work with businesses that want to grow, that need capital, but unfortunately can't get that capital from the banks. We'll work on your business plan, your financial plan and get you lender ready with technical assistance that is NO-COST and confidential. We want to see your business thrive."

-Marvin Boateng, EDC Director of Lending

EDC UPSKILL is dedicated to supporting employers in upskilling their workforce with the skills they need to compete in today's rapidly evolving workplaces. In addition to the Ventura County Digital Upskilling Training Program, EDC UPSKILL provides:

- Reimbursement for employee training
- Peer learning opportunities for company leaders with upskilling responsibilities
- Connections to local and national education and training experts
- Workplace English language learning for immigrants and refugees

Designated as a regional provider of Employment Training Panel funding, EDC helps companies access funding to offset employer costs for customized job skills training. Since December 2021, EDC has helped upskill 226 local employees, enabling trainees to gain highly sought-after skills and employers to remain competitive with a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. In 2024, EDC will expand upskilling services to include English and digital literacy training for agricultural workers in Ventura County.

This year, EDC kicked off the Upskilling Roundtable for private-sector company learning leaders. The network will share insights on successful upskilling programs and company practices while aiming to enhance the quality, accessibility and partnerships for upskilling initiatives across the region, ensuring businesses have a skilled workforce for sustained growth and success.



"I was at a point in my business where I really needed to expand online and explore all the different areas that are connected to setting up and expanding your business and having a good online presence. Since joining this course, I've learned a lot. Deborah Deras [EDC SBDC Business Advisor & Get Your Small Business Online Instructor] has been an amazing instructor. She has tons of experience and lots of knowledge, extensive, deep knowledge, on all things social media and pertaining to getting your business online. The classes have been like a gold mine of information."

-Priya Tejra, Small Business Owner Trained Through Ventura County Digital Upskilling Training Program



VENTURA COUNTY DIGITAL UPSKILLING TRAINING PROGRAM UPDATE

TRAINING PROGRAM 2023 IMPACT

194

**Computer Basics Students
Trained & 133 in Training**

90

**Information & Communications
Technologies Students
in Training**

78

**Small Businesses &
Entrepreneurs Trained**

The Ventura County Digital Upskilling Training Program has been highly effective in training adult learners needing basic computer skills, current workers seeking industry-specific certifications and entrepreneurs looking to modernize their business. Graduates of the Computer Basics pilot course reported that the course increased their confidence to try new technology and their access to online resources, and 53.3% of respondents were able to move into a better job. The program will continue to offer classes in each training category and help place at least 100 workers into higher-paying jobs.

As a part of the program's commitment to developing a pilot program that can be expanded across California, EDC has developed a Computer Basics replication toolkit in partnership with the Ventura County Office of Education. The Computer Basics Toolkit provides everything needed to teach the course, including the upskilling curriculum, a

detailed instructor guide and program evaluation and administration tools. The highly successful Computer Basics course will also be offered in Santa Barbara County in early 2024.



Bill Bartels' dedication as the Ventura County Film Liaison ensures that EDC FILM consistently ranks within the top three among 42 statewide centers for film days per year.

EDC FILM

Innovation, collaboration and consolidation have been the cornerstones of the cinematic landscape in Ventura County over the past year. Consistent cooperation among the County's permitting entities and ingenuity from the revitalized workforce have played crucial roles in the ongoing recovery from the early impacts of COVID-19. Streamlining production procedures, miniaturizing equipment and integrating technology into on-location filming has increased efficiency, creativity and profitability across the industry.

One of the key players in facilitating efficient on-location shooting is the Ventura County Film Liaison, Bill Bartels. EDC FILM (Ventura County Film Commission) has been a longstanding collaborator of the California Film Commission, and Bill is currently serving as vice-chair of Film Liaisons in California Statewide, the professional organization dedicated to promoting filming throughout California. He is focused not only on enhancing film within Ventura County but also on ensuring statewide policies and procedures mirror changes in production. Bill's dedication ensures that the Ventura County Film Commission consistently ranks within the top three among 42 statewide centers for film days per year.

Notwithstanding EDC's work to support the industry, labor conflicts and the industry's restructuring have left a more profound impact than previous disruptions. From 2022 to 2023, the economic impact of film in Ventura County declined 53.2%, compared to the 10.7% decline from 2019 to 2020 due to the impacts of COVID-19. The County's collaborative processes facilitated a swift recovery in 2021 and, without a doubt, will provide a critical foundation for recovery in 2024, once industry, craft and guild agreements are firmly in place.

EDC FILM 2023 IMPACT

803
Permits

2,549
Film Days

\$42,273,754
In Economic Impact

BROADBAND CONSORTIUM OF THE PACIFIC COAST

Households, businesses and public institutions rely on broadband to conduct basic activities. Providing a gateway to education, employment, healthcare and civic participation, broadband connectivity is a necessity that empowers individuals and transforms communities. In turn, the absence of reliable, high-speed internet provided through broadband technology leaves many without access to crucial opportunities. Closing the gap between those with the capacity to use technology and those left out of opportunities provided by digital access relies on a robust broadband infrastructure.

Established in 2014 as an initiative of EDC, the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) advocates for broadband deployment and adoption in Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. Aiming to ensure affordable internet access for all, equip residents with necessary digital skills and prepare communities for technological advancements, BCPC fosters collaboration between public and private entities, leverages innovation and strategically invests in the region's technological infrastructure. Through information sharing, coordination and support, BCPC works tirelessly to bridge the digital divide, fostering economic prosperity and unlocking 21st-century opportunities for everyone in the Tri-County area.



Providing a gateway to education, employment, healthcare and civic participation, broadband connectivity is a necessity that empowers individuals and transforms communities. In turn, the absence of reliable, high-speed internet leaves many without access to crucial opportunities.

In 2023, BCPC:

- Supported public and private entity applications to access nearly \$90 million in regionally allocated state and federal funding administered through the California Public Utilities Commission to deploy broadband infrastructure across the Tri-County region, connecting unserved and under-served households to high-speed internet options.
- Continued to advance digital equity and disinvested communities' access to affordable internet with support from the California Emerging Technologies Fund. Recruited Molika Oum as BCPC's Digital Equity Advocate, working with community-based organizations to improve adoption rates and implement digital literacy resources and tech support programs.
- Partnered with Michael Foote and Russ Levanway from REACH to aid in San Luis Obispo County's broadband deployment, fostering increased connections and sharing resources among public and private entities.
- Assisted Ventura County Council of Governments (VCOG) in the successful application for a \$498,000 Local Agency Technical Assistance grant, working with VCOG to develop a Regional Broadband Strategic Plan and build organizational capacity for VCOG to oversee broadband deployment across Ventura County.
- Partnered with the County of Santa Barbara to support and guide the implementation of the countywide Broadband Strategic Plan.

SANTA BARBARA OCEAN COLLECTIVE

The vast potential of the blue economy lies in our collective ability to sustainably harness the resources of the ocean. In Santa Barbara, this potential faces a crucial bottleneck due to the absence of adequate facilities for storage and seafood processing. Despite the region's rich maritime heritage, the lack of proper infrastructure severely hinders the growth of the local blue economy and impedes the efficient utilization of the abundant marine resources.

Recognizing this challenge, the Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara has established the Santa Barbara Ocean Collective. The collective seeks to support the development of the Central Coast blue economy by establishing a multi-faceted facility and programs that enable innovation and expansion of sustainable ocean entrepreneurs.

EDC proudly supported the Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara in their endeavor to establish the Santa Barbara Ocean Collective, aligning with the goals of the collective to empower marine entrepreneurs and foster long-term sustainability of the maritime economy. Committed to the triple bottom line of economy, equity and environment, EDC recognizes the importance of fostering a thriving blue economy.

In support, EDC:

- Conducted a comprehensive community engagement session focused on fostering cohesive collaboration among maritime stakeholders, as a part of Uplift Central Coast's planning process.
- Developed a white paper detailing the purpose and objectives of the Santa Barbara Ocean Collective, illuminating the range of available opportunities within the maritime domain and highlighting potential avenues for sustainable economic advancement.
- Facilitated the progression of a Memorandum of Understanding with Santa Barbara City College, aimed at exploring and potentially establishing facilities tailored to support both commercial fishing enterprises and specialized academic programs focused on maritime studies.

Blue Economy (n.): the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs and ocean ecosystem health – World Bank



EDC SBDC SUCCESS STORY – GET HOOKED SEAFOOD

Fueled by a passion for local seafood and shared ties to the Santa Barbara fishing community, co-founders Kim Selkoe, Ph.D., CEO, and Victoria Voss, COO, embarked on a journey to better their community by creating the business Get Hooked Seafood in 2018. Get Hooked Seafood is a community-supported fishery that provides high-quality, local seafood and serves as a platform for education, community engagement and social responsibility. With their shared knowledge of all things ocean, Get Hooked Seafood has set itself apart by offering access to sustainable seafood with a transparent sourcing model and an educational mission to connect people to local fisheries.

Recognizing the importance of community involvement, Get Hooked Seafood has established partnerships with 25 local businesses, spanning from Santa Ynez to Pasadena and Manhattan Beach.



Co-founders Kim Selkoe, Ph.D., and Victoria Voss

This network has allowed them to offer convenient pick-up sites for their customers and strengthen ties with the local business ecosystem.

However, they've had their fair share of obstacles in their entrepreneurial path. The COVID-19 pandemic presented unforeseen obstacles, including cash flow issues and the need to reconfigure their website. Facing these challenges head-on, Kim and Victoria turned to EDC in 2021 for guidance and connected with many business advisors who helped their business exponentially.

With the assistance of Erin Fredregill, an EDC SBDC Business Advisor specializing in marketing, Get Hooked Seafood navigated the complexities of the digital world. Victoria described how Erin "gave us so much guidance and support in setting up social media, our accounts and how to understand the data. She was just a great guide in helping us get set up and be able to digest the data and information that we were getting." Another pivotal figure that contributed to the business' success was EDC SBDC Business Advisor Anthony Elliott, whose guidance proved instrumental during cash flow difficulties. Kim said, "We were really having cash flow problems, and Tony helped us get a handle on our financial plan. He held my hand every step of the way." Victoria and Kim expressed that during the time of need for their business, they looked to Anthony for guidance with their finances and received more help than they expected.

Looking towards the future, Get Hooked Seafood is expanding its impact by collaborating with local school districts. Kim and Victoria are spearheading efforts to introduce seafood into school cafeterias, aiming to familiarize children with the taste of seafood and educate them about its importance. The company's story is not just one of business success but a testament to the community spirit and dedication to sustainability embodied by Kim, Victoria and the entire Get Hooked Seafood team.



"We were really having cash flow problems, and our EDC SBDC Advisor helped us get a handle on our financial plan. They held my hand every step of the way."

- Kim Selkoe, Ph.D., EDC SBDC Client

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – THE ISABELLA PROJECT

By the 2025-2026 academic year, California will have implemented Universal Pre-K (UPK), ensuring that four-year-olds are provided free access to a Transitional Kindergarten program from their local school district. While UPK expands equal access to quality education, it is also expected to be disruptive to the business model of Early Child Education (ECE) programs currently serving this four-year-old population.

Facing this change head-on, the Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCF) has proactively organized the Isabella Project, a group of over 80 community partners across Ventura County committed to studying, preparing for and responding to the impacts and benefits of transitioning to UPK. The Isabella Project's purpose is to make top-tier early childhood education accessible to all 3- to 4-year-olds in Santa Paula now, ahead of the statewide implementation. This pilot will act as a model for creating a network of wrap-around care that can be replicated in cities across the region.

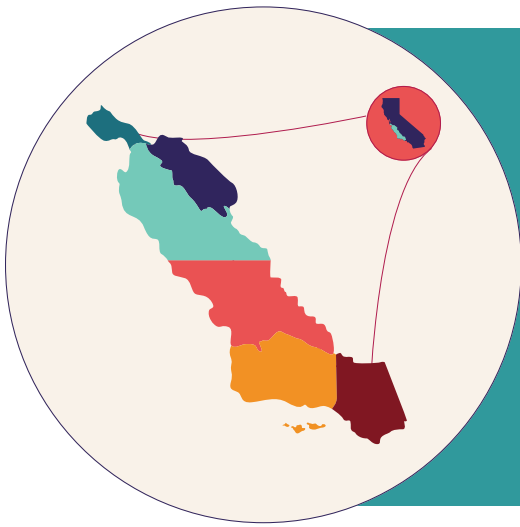


As a regional lead in child care-related entrepreneurship, EDC has joined the Isabella Project and been granted first-year funding by VCCF to:

- Augment and expand EDC's existing initiative in increasing home-based child care provider capacity, which has been funded by the County of Ventura under American Rescue Plan Act guidelines.
- Concentrate the business technical assistance and quality coaching resources of our existing ECE partnership with Child Development Resources, First 5 Ventura County and the County Office of Education on assuring that all providers in Santa Paula receive the support essential to managing the transition to UPK.
- Launch a comprehensive outreach and assessment program, empowering ECE providers to identify their specific needs and challenges.
- Contribute to the creation of an ECE Network to foster collaboration among center-based programs and family child care providers.
- Establish a forgivable loan fund offering financial assistance up to \$30,000 for essential site modifications and necessary expenses.

EDC is proud to advance the Isabella Project by addressing potential disruptions and fostering resilience during this transition. Isabella Project funding from VCCF augments American Rescue Plan Act resources provided by the County of Ventura to assure our capacity to equip ECE providers with the resources and tools they need to navigate the UPK transition successfully, ensuring the highest quality care and education access for young children and families across the region.

The Isabella Project's purpose is to make top-tier early childhood education accessible to all 3- to 4-year-olds in Santa Paula now to study, prepare for and respond to the impacts and benefits of Universal Pre-K.



Uplift Central Coast (Uplift) is led by a partnership comprised of REACH (based in San Luis Obispo), EDC and the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP). REACH is the lead convener, with EDC and MBEP serving as co-conveners for community engagement and EDC serving as the partnership's fiscal agent. Uplift is guided by the triple-bottom-line principles of economic vitality, social equity and environmental sustainability.

UPLIFT CENTRAL COAST

Uplift Central Coast (Uplift) officially kicked off a 2-year planning process to create an inclusive economic development plan for the six-county region of Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. Funding for this planning has been generously provided through California's Community Economic Resilience Fund (recently rebranded as CA Jobs First).

With a commitment to reach, engage and secure input from and ultimately provide benefit to disadvantaged, disproportionately impacted and under-represented communities, Uplift has hosted dozens of community listening sessions throughout the six counties. These sessions have prioritized learning from the region's community members and public and private sector leaders across a broad diversity of sectors including education, workforce development, social and environmental justice, organized labor and more. Augmented by extensive data analysis conducted by the Brookings Institute and guided by a team of regional data advisors, this invaluable community feedback sets the foundation for Central Coast's regional plan. All inputs are evaluated and approved by a six-county Vision Committee and north and south Regional Steering Committees, assuring that the planning and economic priorities support the communities most in need.

This planning phase is only the first phase of the multi-year initiative. Once completed, the regional plan will serve as a catalyst to compete for a range of federal, philanthropic and state funding, including several hundred million dollars statewide through CA Jobs First. The projects are intended to diversify local economies and develop sustainable industries that create high-quality, accessible jobs for all Californians. We are looking forward to completing the planning phase by mid-2024 and beginning the process of prioritizing and funding projects for advancing broadly shared economic opportunity.





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Economic Development Collaborative
4001 Mission Oaks Blvd., Suite A-1
Camarillo, CA 93012
805.409.9159 www.edcollaborative.com