



ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
COLLABORATIVE



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT 2024

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.



EDC COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT 2024

Dear Partners, Stakeholders and Friends,

Reflecting on 2024, we are struck again by how strategic partnerships are the core of our work and how they drive our impact and our character.

For example, we have long had a productive relationship with the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) and its Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOBSA). Building on our already strong team of international trade advisors, OSBA funded EDC to develop and deliver a global business training curriculum statewide, assuring that our region will be at the center of California's strategic investments for connecting local businesses to global markets. We also serve as an CalOBSA Accelerate California: Inclusive Innovation Hub, through which we secured \$5 million in equity investments for women and minority-owned businesses.

Leveraging our broad regional influence, we serve as the fiscal agent on behalf of GO-Biz for Uplift Central Coast, a six-county partnership, securing \$19 million to drive a post-pandemic economic strategy for equitable and inclusive growth.

Funding secured by Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin has fueled our enormously successful digital upskilling initiative. Our partnership with the Ventura County Adult Schools Consortium resulted in 600 mostly low-income and minority workers completing a curriculum that has advanced their employability and earnings. Working with Women's Economic Ventures, 120 firms completed our Get Your Small Business Online program. And thanks to our partnerships with GBL Systems and CompTIA, 180 workers completed industry-recognized training to advance their careers.

These represent just a small profile of how the region benefits from such an extraordinary network of resources. Read on through our 2024 Community Impact Report for more. We look forward to building on this work, assuring broadly shared economic prosperity for all in our region.

Bruce Stenslie
EDC President/CEO



EDC | LOAN

NEW LOAN FUND

The City of Oxnard partnered with EDC to launch a new \$150,000 loan fund to support small business owners who haven't qualified for traditional bank loans.

LOAN CAPITAL

EDC continued to manage loan capital from Banc of California, N.A., City of Atascadero, City of Camarillo, City of Oxnard, City of Simi Valley, City of Ventura, First Five Ventura County, Mechanics Bank and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

RISK SECURITY

Managed contributions for loan loss reserves supporting lending from City National Bank, Bank of Southern California and First Citizens 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 2024 IMPACT

Over \$3.7M
Available Loan Capital

Over \$1.35M
Loaned

As the leading member of the California Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Network, including 49 service centers supporting 91 locations, EDC SBDC was:

- 1st in Consulting Hours & 2nd in Clients Served
- 1st in Instances of Capital Accessed for Hispanic-Owned Firms
- 2nd in Value of Capital Accessed for African American-Owned Firms
- 3rd in Value of Capital Accessed for Native American-Owned Firms
- 3rd in Instances of Capital Accessed for Women-Owned Firms



EDC SBDC 2024 IMPACT

3,242
Clients Served

13,391
Hours of Consulting

80
Start-Ups

1,012
Jobs Created

16,799
Jobs Supported

Over \$50.9M
In Capital Infusion

Left to Right: EDC SBDC Director Dr. Ray Bowman, CalOBSA Assistant Deputy Director Chris Earl, Los Angeles Regional SBDC Network Executive Director Pat Nye

ARTS & CULTURE

EDC SBDC partnered with Ventura County's Arts & Culture Investment Fund Program to provide financial management, grant writing and marketing development workshops to over 60 individual artists and 35 arts-supporting nonprofits.

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

Did you know EDC is a CalOBSA Accelerate California: Inclusive Innovation Hub? Throughout the year, EDC partnered with over 50 local organizations to ensure underserved entrepreneurs have equitable access to capital, technical assistance, networking opportunities and physical spaces for innovation.

EDC SUCCESS STORY - FLAMINGO BOX CO.



Owner Candy Straight

INDUSTRY: Retail

LOCATION: Ventura County

FOUNDED: 2024

BACKGROUND

Finding the right birthday gift can be difficult, let alone a thoughtful gift for deeply personal situations like a bad break-up or medical diagnosis. Candy Straight noticed that many people struggled to find appropriate gifts for these occasions and was inspired to create Flamingo Box Co., a platform that helps people find the perfect gift for life's messiest moments. Knowing she wanted to launch Flamingo Box Co. debt-free, Candy found a solution in the EDC SBDC.

The CA Dream Fund, facilitated by the Los Angeles SBDC Network, catalyzed Candy's vision by providing financial assistance and comprehensive start-up training. Reflecting on her experience, Candy expressed, "I started looking for grants and came across the EDC, which helped me find phenomenal resources, and my mind was blown. I couldn't believe that something like this existed. It made me fall in love with California even more because I realized that the state rewards companies that generate employment opportunities. I fell in love with California even more through the EDC. My husband and I were both just in awe and beyond grateful."

EDC IMPACT

Integral to Flamingo Box Co.'s success was Candy's partnership with EDC SBDC financial advisor, Tony Elliott. Tony became Candy's unwavering advocate, offering invaluable insights and challenging her to confront demanding business decisions. Candy mentioned, "Tony helped me with the nuts and bolts of my company. He was the right type of tough love that I needed. He asked challenging questions, guided me through the Dream Fund and set me up for success in receiving the grant. Tony was my number-one cheerleader. I wouldn't be where I'm at right now without him."

Looking ahead, Candy's ambitions for Flamingo Box Co. go beyond traditional success. With aspirations to feature on prominent platforms like the Jennifer Hudson Show, Oprah's Favorite Things and Shark Tank, Candy's vision encompasses business growth and philanthropic impact. Her plans for Flamingo Box Co. Gifts Back, a nonprofit to give back to the community, exemplify her commitment to social responsibility. Flamingo Box Co.'s journey shows what's possible with the right resources and a supportive ecosystem.

"I started looking for grants and came across the EDC, which helped me find phenomenal resources, and my mind was blown. I couldn't believe that something like this existed." - Candy Straight

**EDC GGTP
2024 IMPACT**

443
Clients Served

18
Grants Secured for
Expansion into
International Markets

Over \$21.83M
In Capital Accessed



Left to Right: EDC Director of Strategic Relations Alondra Gaytán, EDC SBDC Trade Specialist Simona Filip Racek, Deputy Under Secretary for International Trade Diane Farrell, BioScience Alliance Founder Brent Reinke, County of Ventura District 2 Supervisor Jeff Gorell

INDIA TRADE MISSION

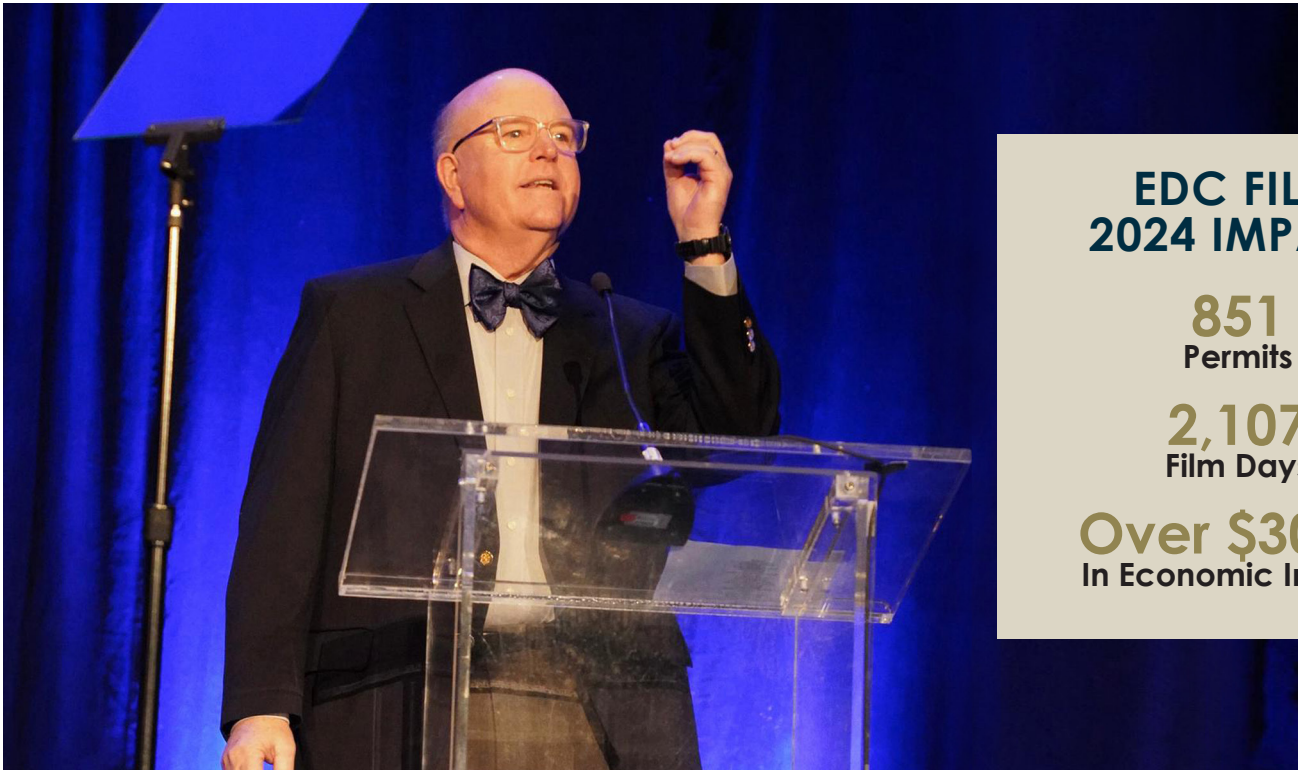
The Ventura County Biotech Trade Delegation's visit to India forged stronger connections between the local biotech industry and India's fast-growing biotechnology sector. Led by EDC Board Member and County of Ventura District 2 Supervisor Jeff Gorell and organized alongside BioScience Alliance's Brent Reinke, EDC SBDC Director Dr. Ray Bowman DBA, CGBP, Six Sigma Greenbelt and Trade Specialist Simona Filip Racek, CGBP, this mission opened new international markets and fostered strategic partnerships. With EDC SBDC's support, participating companies were thoroughly prepared, gained critical insights into market dynamics and regulatory landscapes, developed informed entry strategies for this promising market and continue to benefit from the partnerships developed during the mission.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ABROAD

EDC expanded an existing partnership with the Consulate of Mexico to provide their Program of Entrepreneurship for Mexican Women Abroad (PCEME, in Spanish) in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. PCEME helps Mexican entrepreneurs living in the United States start or grow their businesses, promoting their financial and economic independence abroad. In 2024, EDC SBDC Business Advisor Luisa Arzate worked with 23 entrepreneurs, 21 of whom formally established their businesses thanks to the strategic, financial and marketing training provided through PCEME.



PCEME Participant & Servicio de Limpieza Daisy Owner Inés González



EDC Film Liaison Bill Bartels

**EDC FILM
2024 IMPACT**

851
Permits

2,107
Film Days

Over \$30.55
In Economic Impact

FILM TRENDS

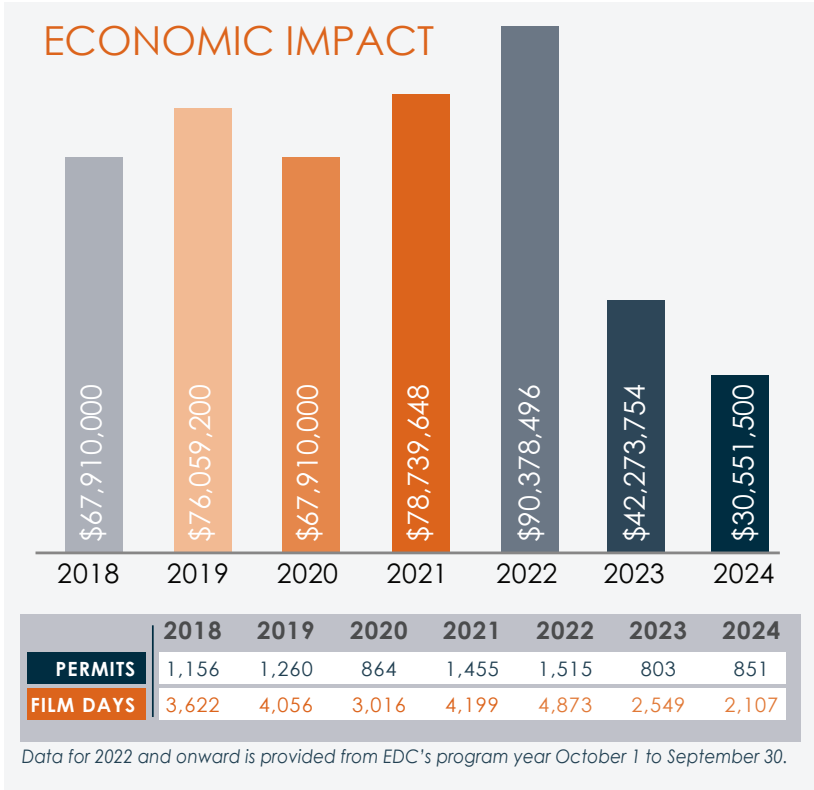
The average number of film days per permit has decreased from 3.17 in 2023 to 2.47 in 2024, reflecting changing production size and style, including an increase in still shoots. As the industry continues to change, EDC FILM (Ventura County Film Commission) is committed to making new production teams welcome by clearing the path to permitting and building partnerships within the creative economy.

SUPPORTING CALIFORNIA

EDC's Film Liaison Bill Bartels is serving as chair for Film Liaisons in California Statewide, the association dedicated to facilitating efficient filming across the state. As chair, Bill supports over 40 film offices providing resources and permitting assistance to their jurisdictions.

WEBSITE UPDATE

The Commission's website has been updated to further facilitate communication between local industry professionals and regional film partners. The new architecture and listing process reflects the Commission's commitment to enhancing the filming experiences for all parties. **Check out the changes at www.venturacountyfilm.com!**



EDC SUCCESS STORY – GOOD LIFE CELLAR



Owners Lisa and Alfred Mesa

INDUSTRY: Food Services

LOCATION: Santa Barbara County

FOUNDED: 2012

BACKGROUND

Lisa and Alfred Mesa's entrepreneurial journey has been fueled by their passion for exceptional customer service and their vision to create a space that enriches their community. Their desire to settle in Solvang and their dream of introducing locals to the delights of regional wines, craft beer and curated goods inspired them to establish their business, anchoring their commitment to success in the town they love.

In 2012, Lisa and Alfred took a leap of faith and launched Good Life Cellar, despite facing initial hurdles. Their dedication and perseverance paid off as their venture flourished, becoming a cherished establishment in their community.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unforeseen challenges, threatening the very existence of their business.

Amidst the uncertainty, Tracy Beard, an EDC SBDC advisor and the Solvang Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, emerged as a beacon of support for Lisa and Alfred. As existing chamber members, they trusted Tracy's guidance and suggestion to become EDC SBDC clients.

EDC IMPACT

With Tracy's help, they swiftly adapted their business model to meet changing market demands, revamping their website and launching an online shop to serve customers during lockdown. Lisa noted, "Tracy made sure everything was getting done and we were getting the support we needed. She made it about as easy as it could possibly be, and it was not easy." Additionally, Lisa and Alfred secured a COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan with Tracy's assistance, providing vital financial support to sustain their business.

Reflecting on their journey, Alfred emphasized, "The biggest thing is not to be afraid to ask for help because it is out there. Just be humble and humble yourself to ask the questions. Running a business is not easy. There's a lot going on, and having a helping hand is huge."

Looking ahead, Lisa and Alfred are focused on celebrating Good Life Cellar's milestones and continuing to foster community support for their business. With the ongoing support of the EDC SBDC, they are confident in their ability to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

"As a small business owner, getting free expert advice is unheard of, and knowing that EDC is there through every step is fantastic. I wish we had known about EDC sooner because this would have been an amazing resource for us when we opened our business."

-Lisa Mesa





TRAINING REIMBURSEMENT

EDC earned a new contract with the Employment Training Panel (ETP), providing financial assistance to local employers to offset the cost of worker training. EDC continues to empower employers to invest in their workforce and foster individual career growth, a highly sought-after benefit in today's job market.

ENGLISH UPSKILLING

Thanks to a special grant of \$236,160 from ETP, EDC is also providing career-aligned English upskilling to immigrants, refugees and speakers of other languages. By removing English as a barrier, employers can retain and attract local talent. EDC has partnered with EnGen, a virtual learning platform, that allows employees to complete job-specific lessons online in as little as 10 minutes. Unlike other programs, workers do not need Social Security Numbers to qualify, making over 130 courses widely accessible across the region.

CONNECTING EMPLOYERS

EDC's Upskilling Roundtable is connecting company leaders with upskilling responsibilities who want to create, expand and improve their company's upskilling programs. This employer-focused peer learning network connects continuous learning-committed individuals to new opportunities, ensuring regional businesses have the skilled workforce they need to succeed and grow. **Interested in learning more? Email upskill@edcollaborative.com!**

VENTURA COUNTY DIGITAL UPSKILLING TRAINING PROGRAM IMPACT

Increasing digital skills of job seekers, current workers and small business operators with the support of State Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin

TRAINING	2024	TOTAL TO DATE
Computer Basics	246 Trained	601 Trained
Information & Communications Technologies	56 Completed AWS Certification & 119 Completed CompTIA Training	180 Trained
Get Your Small Business Online	62 Trained	120 Trained

MODEL PROGRAM AWARD

In October 2024, the training program was recognized as a Model Program at the California Adult Education Program (CAEP) Summit by the CAEP Technical Assistance Project. Being added to the Advancing CA Adult Education Showcase Repository is a testament to EDC's successful practices and helps teachers, coordinators and administrators across California use and implement the program's curriculum.

REPLICATION TOOLKITS

As a part of the program's commitment to expanding the pilot's reach, the EDC team, in partnership with the Ventura County Office of Education and Women's Economic Ventures, has developed replication toolkits for both the Computer Basics Course and the Get Your Small Business Online Course. The toolkits include the entire course curriculum in both English and Spanish, ready-to-use slides, presentation notes, student worksheets, instructor guides, program evaluation tools and administration tips.

Partners across the region, including the American GI Forum in Goleta, Project50 and Santa Barbara Partners in Education, are rolling out classes using the program's replication toolkits. Over 140 additional students have received Computer Basics training thanks to the pilots' expansion!

EDC is calling on community organizations, schools, libraries, nonprofits, workforce development boards and others across the state and beyond to utilize the NO-COST replication toolkits and join the movement to close the digital skills gap.

**COMPUTER BASICS
TOOLKIT**
www.bit.ly/edc-computerbasics

**GET YOUR SMALL BUSINESS
ONLINE TOOLKIT**
www.bit.ly/edc-getbisonline

EDC INITIATIVES



Left to Right: EDC Uplift Community Engagement Coordinator Iriany Sánchez, Uplift Project Manager Lady Freire, REACH President & CEO Melissa James, EDC President & CEO Bruce Stenslie, Uplift Project Director Quinn Brady, MBEP President & CEO Tahra Goraya, EDC Director of Strategic Relations Alondra Gaytán

Uplift Central Coast (Uplift) is a coalition working together toward a shared vision of a diverse, inclusive economy built by and for the region's residents. Uplift is convened by REACH, EDC and the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP).

UPLIFT CENTRAL COAST

REGIONAL RESEARCH

Capturing the complex realities and disparities that the Central Coast faces, Uplift's Regional Plan Part I, released in January, synthesizes data from economic research and extensive community input to inform an analysis of the current barriers and potential solutions.

EQUITABLE STRATEGIES

Uplift's Regional Plan Part II, released in October, identifies equitable strategies to create quality job opportunities, improve workforce skills and address specific regional economic challenges. These strategies are directly informed by Part I findings and shaped through a comprehensive community engagement process.

PREDEVELOPMENT FUNDING

In October, Uplift embarked on the next phase of work, the Catalyst Phase, to implement the strategies outlined in Part II. The coalition was awarded \$14 million through the California Jobs First program to fund critical predevelopment activities essential for laying the groundwork for long-term success. Funding awards will be announced in early 2025!

Stay up-to-date with Uplift's work and review the Regional Plans at www.upliftcentralcoast.org!

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In 2024, EDC assisted over 370 in-home child care businesses and privately owned centers. Addressing access and creating equal opportunities for child care providers, EDC prioritized flexible, multilingual training outside of standard operating hours and provided 52 child care business owners with stipends for time spent away from their businesses to receive advising services. The County of Ventura provided funding after 5 hours of advising and workshop sessions. EDC also provided 61 business advisors with training and development to further strengthen their ability to support the child care industry across local, federal and statewide levels.

BROADBAND CONSORTIUM OF THE PACIFIC COAST

ACCESSING FUNDING

BCPC supported applications to the California Public Utilities Commission's Federal Funding Account grant program, which resulted in over \$22.7M in funding for middle and last-mile infrastructure projects being awarded across Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. The approved projects are estimated to benefit over 24,000 residents, 9,000 of whom are currently underserved.

CONFIRMING ACCESS

In partnership with Econ Alliance, BCPC developed a pilot project to measure internet access in mobile homes in North Santa Barbara County. The project has discovered that many areas indicated to be covered by local providers did not have quality internet access. The findings make the region eligible for funding from the California Advanced Services Fund Broadband Public Housing Account and the pilots' expansion in 2025 will continue to validate service across the region.

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS

To support the development of a regional broadband strategic plan, BCPC and the Ventura Council of Governments formed a regional broadband working group. Representatives from Ventura County and each city convened to provide opportunities for shared learning and the development of a plan that addresses both regional and unique community needs. The regional plan will allow the county to seek funding for projects to improve affordable access to broadband.

Check out all of BCPC's 2024 activities at [www.bit.ly/bcpc2024highlights!](http://www.bit.ly/bcpc2024highlights)

Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) advocates for digital equity across Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties working with regional public and private partners to increase broadband access, improve economic prosperity and realize 21st-century opportunities for tri-county residents. BCPC is hosted by EDC in partnership with REACH.

EDC is a regional leader in childcare-related entrepreneurship, regularly partnering with Child Development Resources, First 5 Ventura County and the Ventura County Office of Education to support the next generation's education and career success.





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