

As American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funding and other emergency funding is wound down, communities are now reeling from the lack of grant support in some cases to “right the ship” so-to-speak post COVID. As organizations with researchers working in communities across the world (and right here in our back yards) like the National Institute of Health and the National Science Foundation, for example, have been forced to terminate grants and conduct mass layoffs, what may seem a “drop in the bucket” to a larger bottom line, can derail one person’s entire life, devast local economies and narrow our outlooks and world view. This also fans the flames of fear, distrust and openness to new information (that may be critical to moving forward). Now, more than ever, we must be mindful of this.

Moving forward, with any partnership, as well as any and all collaborative effort, let us genuinely be mindful of one another, meaning: connect together, let go of judgement as we do not stand in one another’s shoes, and make an intentional and valid attempt to do so while offering grace. We cannot know what one another are going through, but we can rely on tried and true frameworks such as Asset-Based Doing and the Principles of Community Development.

For now, though in choppy waters, the Center for Community & Economic Development is working to find funding for the Tribal Fellows’ stipends. Additionally, we have postponed the kick-off event to August but may be unable to begin recruitment based on American and nation-specific policies. However, we are determined to keep the ball rolling and are working closely with all partners to help pave the way smoothly for continued collaborative development. One thing is for sure, while we are tasked with making a clearer case for community within economics and development, dollars and cents can only tell the story so far. It is people that ultimately create and drive systems, govern them and live within them. The tale of our collective impact journey has reached a new chapter. We have turned a page, and what unfolds will be as we live it.



SPRING REI UPDATE

Jenan Jondy, Project Coordinator REI: CCED

Since 2011, the Michigan State University U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) University Center for Regional Economic Innovation (REI) has supported over 180 innovative economic development projects in Michigan, spurring high-growth entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic innovation. To date, REI projects have had over \$68 million in economic impact in distressed regions of Michigan with 97 Student-Led Faculty Guided technical assistance projects, 69 Co-Learning Plans, and 16 Innovation Fellows.

At the end of September 2024, REI made the call on authors and experts to contribute to the next annual cycle of its work to develop new Co-Learning Plans. These Co-Learning Plans serve as essential resources for local and state economic development practitioners and policymakers, providing guidance as they make decisions that affect Michigan’s distressed communities and regions. Through an annual process of outreach, REI and partners identified seven topics for possible Co-Learning Plans in 2025: Workforce Transition and Economic Adaptation; Fair Share Affordable Housing Linked to State Supported Economic Development; Encouraging Large Companies and Public Institutions to Procure from Local Businesses; Addressing Agricultural Workforce and Infrastructure Shortages through Innovation Centers; Community Economic Impacts and Feasibility of Developing Renewable Energy Sources; Assessing the Capacity of Economic Development Professionals for Community Benefit Plans and Agreements; Assessing Businesses Concerns in Adopting Community Benefit Plans and Agreements; and Other.

After receiving many qualified applications, REI, through the counsel and advice of the Consultative Panel, announced the 2025 project awards.

2025 PROJECT AWARDS

This year, REI will support five innovative CLP projects, each addressing critical challenges and opportunities in Michigan's economic and community development landscape. These projects demonstrate a commitment to advancing equitable, sustainable, and regionally impactful solutions.

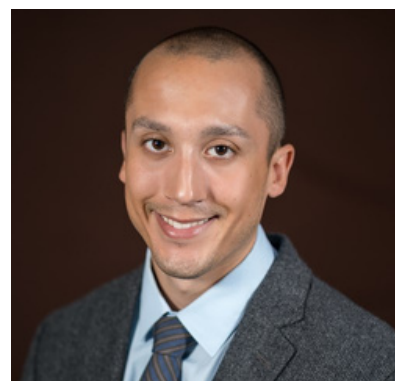
Partnerships for Infrastructure Expansion & Economic Development: Analysis of Michigan Act 425 Agreements, will evaluate the effectiveness of Michigan's Act 425 agreements as tools for addressing housing and infrastructure needs in rural areas. Another CLP, *Buy Flint Initiative: Connecting Local Businesses to Corporate Procurement Opportunities*, focuses on revitalizing Flint's local economy by connecting small businesses and microenterprises with procurement opportunities. This initiative focuses on identifying and supporting local businesses through capacity building programs, resource alignment, and a new BuyFlint directory. In Detroit's Zone 8, *Future-Proofing Detroit: Bringing AI Upskilling to the Neighborhoods* will equip residents with AI literacy and skills to enhance job prospects and economic stability. Practical, neighborhood-based training on AI tools will be offered in collaboration with local partners. The initiative also includes plans for an "AI Upskilling Toolkit" to ensure scalability and knowledge sharing with other communities. *Addressing Agricultural Workforce and Infrastructure Shortages through Innovation Centers* proposes to address agricultural labor shortages and infrastructure challenges in Michigan by proposing the development of agricultural innovation centers. These centers would coordinate existing resources, such as private sector expertise, university research, and career and technical education, to provide training and support for a well-prepared domestic workforce.



CLP Awardee: Laura Sigmon



CLP Awardee: Rob Carson



CLP Awardee: Zach Vega

The last CLP award, *Changing the Paradigm: Mobilizing Community Investment Funds*, funded an innovative event on March 7, 2025, in East Lansing, Michigan. With over 180 attendees, the event took a deep dive into the critical and evolving role of community investment funds, offering attendees the chance to learn from leaders at the forefront of the community capital movement. Participants engaged in expert-led, interactive discussions, and invaluable networking opportunities designed to equip attendees with the necessary resources and connections to support their own community's investment fund. This in-person convening brought together community builders, entrepreneurs, developers, and investors, facilitating connections that advance the community capital movement.

Through additional support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the 2025 projects will also include Student-Led, Faculty-Guided (SLFG) projects. These technical assistance projects provide assistance to Michigan communities in completing local and regional economic development initiatives. Work is completed by students at colleges and universities throughout the state, under the supervision of experienced faculty.

Through these projects, students gain firsthand and practical experience in the application of previously studied theory, and economic development professionals receive technical assistance that might not otherwise be available.

The 2025 projects will include the *Downtown Beaverton Land Use and Parking Optimization Study*, which aims to balance parking needs with sustainable design; the *Lansing Riverfront Revitalization* project, enhancing public spaces and identifying private development opportunities; and the *Van Dyke Corridor Implementation Plan* in South Warren, targeting key economic opportunities and community improvements. Further, the *Delhi and Watertown Townships Sign Ordinance Update* will ensure compliance with Court decisions regarding the regulation of signs based on content; the *City of Sterling Heights Corridor Study* will provide planners with data and recommendations to attract development and support local stakeholders, and the *Watertown Township Sign Ordinance Modernization* project will make recommendations for modern sign regulations, including digital signage. Additional technical assistance support is also being provided to the 2025 Michigan Inventors Coalition (MIC) Expo.

MICHIGAN INVENTORS COALITION EXPO

MIC is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping start-up inventors bring their ideas to life and guiding them through the innovation process. MIC seeks to provide inventors and entrepreneurs with the tools, connections, and knowledge they need to succeed. The Expo, now in its 14th year, is scheduled for August 14, 2025 – the same day and time of the Innovate Michigan! Summit. The Expo will bring together inventors, startups, small businesses, patent attorneys, economic development professionals, and more. Attendees will gain access to expert panels and speakers: Top-ranked speakers share insights and guidance on critical topics for inventors and entrepreneurs; networking opportunities: Attendees connect with like-minded individuals, potential collaborators, and industry professionals who can help take their ideas to the next level; exhibitor space: Inventors showcase their products, ideas, or businesses while meeting individuals and organizations who can provide support; spin pitch & sell competition: A friendly competition where inventors hone their pitch skills, gain exposure, and compete for prizes. Additional SLFG projects will be funded throughout the summer.



2024 Michigan Inventor's Coalition Expo



2024 Michigan Inventor's Coalition Expo



2024 MIC Summit: Breakout Sessions

INNOVATION FELLOWSHIP

REI also continues to support Innovation Fellows in distressed Michigan communities. Established in 2016, the Innovation Fellows Program seeks to incorporate the tools, models, and policies identified in Co-Learning Projects into practice. Innovation Fellows provide on-the-ground support and coordination to move concepts to actions, implementing new economic development tools, models, policies, and practices.



This year's Innovation Fellow, Jon Willow, will focus on leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance coalition-building within Michigan's MITTEN regions, addressing administrative inefficiencies, resource limitations, and organizational burnout to advance digital equity. Jon's expertise in digital equity is rooted in her extensive work with Michigan-based organizations.

Congratulations to the 2025 Co-Learning Plan, Innovation Fellow, and Student Led Faculty Guided awardees! We are excited to support these projects and look forward to their contributions to Michigan's economic and community development goals. To learn more about these and other projects, visit: <https://reicenter.org/projects/current-projects>



Hello from our Humphrey Fellow!



MEET ALICIA ARTEAGA: HUMPHREY FELLOW

Alicia Arteaga is a Humphrey Fellow and a Community Benefit Research Assistant at Michigan State University's Center for Community and Economic Development. With advanced degrees in Law and Globalization and over a decade of experience in civil society, she is a passionate advocate for humanitarian, social, and economic development as the cornerstone for thriving communities. Her areas of expertise include entrepreneurship, higher education, governance, and women's leadership. For the past seven years, Alicia has been a dedicated volunteer with World Vision Nicaragua, serving on its Advisory Council's Audit and Risk Committee and later on its Governance Committee. She has been appointed to serve as the next president of the Advisory Council upon her return.

Alicia's multidisciplinary background lays the foundation for a holistic vision in every initiative she undertakes. She is deeply committed to fostering critical thinking, global citizenship, and sustainable development. Ultimately, she aspires to reduce migration and strengthen local communities in Nicaragua by supporting the creation of formal businesses and cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship. In her free time, she enjoys reading, cooking, traveling, and watching films from around the world—an experience that nurtures her appreciation for diverse cultures and perspectives.