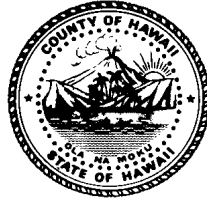


Mitchell D. Roth
Mayor

Deanna S. Sako
Managing Director

West Hawai'i Office
74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Hwy
Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740
Phone (808) 323-4770
Fax (808) 327-3563



County of Hawai'i PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Zendo Kern
Director

Jeffrey W. Darrow
Deputy Director

East Hawai'i Office
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 3
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720
Phone (808) 961-8288
Fax (808) 961-8742

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NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact: Jen Myers

Jennifer.Myers@hawaiicounty.gov

808-961-8729

COUNTY OF HAWAII AND HO'OU LU LĀHUI AWARDED ECONOMIC RECOVERY CORPS (ERC) FELLOWSHIP, WELCOMING MINA VIRITUA JR.

The County of Hawai'i, in collaboration with the local Puna organization Ho'oulu Lāhui, is thrilled to announce that they have been awarded an Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) fellow for a 30-month fellowship. The fellow for this initiative is Mina Viritua Jr., a dedicated individual with a deep connection to the Hilo and Puna community.

"We take a lot of pride in the fact that we were chosen as a host site," said Mayor Mitch Roth. "Mina's connection to Puna positions him as the perfect advocate for our shared vision of economic recovery and community well-being."

The ERC Fellowship program is led by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) through a \$30 million cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). The program aims to build capacity in economically distressed areas across the U.S. while cultivating the next generation of economic development leaders. While no direct grant funds are provided, each Host Organization is matched with a Fellow to work with communities in the implementation of community-based economic development projects.

In a statement, Nathan Ohle, President & CEO of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), expressed the significance of ERC, stating, "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 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."

Mina Viritua Jr. was chosen with careful consideration, his extensive history and deep roots in

the area making him a particularly fitting and conscious selection for the fellowship.

"Being able to do this fellowship in Puna, where I was born and raised, is a dream come true. I am thrilled to contribute to the economic recovery and well-being of the community that has shaped me. Working alongside the incredible people of Puna is not just a job for me; it's a personal and professional journey, and I am eager to make a positive impact."

Susie Osborne, co-founder of Hoʻoulu Lāhui, expressed her enthusiasm for Mina Viritua Jr. joining the program, stating, "We are excited to have Mina as our fellow in the ERC program. His local perspective and deep knowledge of the community make him an invaluable asset. We believe that Mina's commitment will enhance the collaborative efforts to support Puna and contribute to the overall well-being of our community."

The County of Hawai'i and Hoʻoulu Lāhui are among the 65 host sites nationwide selected out of 500 applicants to receive support in advancing a project critical to the economic recovery of their community. The ERC project, titled "Revitalize Puna: Diversifying and Strengthening Our Local Economy," strategically focuses on revitalizing the Puna district, significantly impacted by the 2018 Kīlauea eruption and the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information on this project and the program, visit the [ERC project website](#).

About the Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) Fellowship Program:

The ERC Fellowship program, led by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and supported by national economic development organizations, aims to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in distressed communities by connecting organizations with talented individuals to advance new ways of economic development, promoting resilience and transformative change. The program focuses on building capacity, fostering collaboration, and supporting the next generation of economic development leaders.

About Hoʻoulu Lāhui:

Hoʻoulu Lāhui is a non-profit organization (501-c3), formed in 1995, with the purpose of awakening Hawaiian culture, values, beliefs, and lifestyle in partnership with the community to achieve unity, harmony, and total well-being. The goals of Hoʻoulu Lāhui are: The restoration and management of Hawaiian cultural sites; the development and operation of Hawaiian cultural education center; the self-sufficiency of Hoʻoulu Lāhui through culturally appropriate economic development ventures; and collaboration with other agencies and organizations.