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St. Tammany Corporation Selected as Host Organization in Inaugural Economic Recovery Corps Program

Fellow Will Focus on Capacity Building through Suburban-Rural Regional Coordination on the Northshore

MANDEVILLE, La – St. Tammany Corporation today announces that, following a rigorous application and review process, the organization will serve as a host for a fellow in the inaugural cohort of the Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) program. Launched in 2023 through a \$30 million cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), 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.

Deeneaus Polk, a Gulf Coast native and entrepreneur with a background in international studies and public policy, will serve as St. Tammany Corporation’s ERC fellow. Polk graduated in 2020 with a master’s degree in public policy from Harvard University, is an alumnus of the University of Mississippi, and is a Fulbright Scholar and Fulbright Alumni Ambassador. Prior to joining the ERC, Polk gained hands-on experience in workforce development as a Bosch Fellow in Berlin, Germany, and as the Director of the Mississippi Apprenticeship Program for the Mississippi Community College Board.

“This inaugural cohort of the Economic Recovery Corps has the potential to infuse new energy and new opportunities in regional economic development nationwide,” said **U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo**. “We can usher in a new era of economic prosperity that leaves no community in America behind by simultaneously centering to the needs of under-resourced regions and investing in the next generation of economic development leaders.”

During his 30-month fellowship, Polk’s efforts will center on three key focus areas, including catalyzing individual relationships to create collaborative partnerships, providing regional



collaboration support, and developing and implementing tailored strategic plans. Polk will work collaboratively with the executive leadership team at St. Tammany Corporation and key economic development representatives in St. Helena and Washington Parishes to develop and implement community and economic development strategic plans for St. Helena and Washington Parishes, positioning these communities for sustainable economic prosperity through capacity building and resilience efforts.

“St. Tammany Corporation is honored to serve as a host in the inaugural ERC program and continue to be a support and anchor for our partners in the region,” said **Chris Masingill, St. Tammany Corporation CEO**. “This initiative is good for the Northshore, and it’s good for St. Tammany. As we strengthen the economic ecosystem in our region, we strengthen our local economies as well. This is not only a continuation of our dedication to cultivating the next generation of economic development talent; it also reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering tangible regional collaboration.”

“I am overjoyed to be back home along the Gulf Coast and positioned to do impactful, community driven economic development with tremendous leaders,” said **Polk**. “I look forward to collaborating at a deep level and building data-driven, sustainable, and equitable solutions that help all of us elevate together.”

“The Economic Recovery Corps program is unique on many levels,” said **Nicole Manapol, ERC Senior Program Director at IEDC** and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV). “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.”

“St. Helena has been so encouraged and energized by the regional collaboration with our Northshore partners over the recent years to advance economic prosperity,” said **Virginia Bell, St. Helena Economic Development Foundation Executive Director**. “Increasing the professional capacity for community economic development through the ERC program strengthens this regional partnership and positions us for future success.”



“The ERC program is a unique opportunity to enhance the economic and community development capacity and expertise in our parish and region,” said **Ryan Seal, Washington Parish President**. “This is an exciting time for Washington Parish, and the direct engagement with our regional partners increases our connectivity and opportunities.”

“I am looking forward to engaging with the ERC Fellow, Deeneaus Polk, to explore opportunities for business formation and community development,” said **Tyrin Truong, Mayor of the City of Bogalusa**. “Bogalusa remains the economic engine of Washington Parish. By harnessing partnerships and resources, we will advance economic mobility in Bogalusa and our broader community.”

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.

A total of 65 Fellows will serve 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.

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About St. Tammany Corporation: As the lead economic development organization for St. Tammany, [St. Tammany Corporation](#) serves as the comprehensive resource center for business services throughout the parish. Named an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO) by the International Economic Development Council, St. Tammany Corporation’s services include business retention, site selection, workforce development, research and data services, state and local incentives, business attraction, talent retention, certified site development, relocation support, and marketing St. Tammany. Since the organization’s launch in 2018, St. Tammany Corporation facilitated business expansion and attraction announcements representing over \$279.4 million in capital investment and 2,166 new and retained jobs in St. Tammany Parish.



About IEDC: The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization serving economic developers. With more than 4,300 members, IEDC is the largest organization of its kind. Economic developers promote economic well-being and quality of life for their communities by creating, retaining, and expanding jobs that facilitate growth, enhance wealth and provide a stable tax base. From public to private, rural to urban, and local to international, IEDC’s members engage in the full range of economic development practices. Given the breadth of economic development work, our members are employed in various settings, including local, state, provincial, and federal governments, public-private partnerships, chambers of commerce, universities, and a variety of other institutions. When we succeed, our members create high-quality jobs, develop vibrant communities, and improve the quality of life in their regions. Learn more at iedconline.org.

About EDA: The mission of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) is to lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting competitiveness and preparing the nation’s regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy. An agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce, EDA invests in communities and supports regional collaboration in order to create jobs for U.S. workers, promote American innovation, and accelerate long-term sustainable economic growth. Learn more at www.eda.gov.