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**Contact:**

Nicole Mechem, Senior Program Officer  
IREX  
2121 K Street NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-628-8188  
[nmechem@irex.org](mailto:nmechem@irex.org)

**Local Contact:**

Rachel Powers, Executive Director  
Citizens' Environmental Coalition  
6420 Richmond Suite 658  
Houston, TX 77057  
713-524-4232  
[rachel@cechouston.org](mailto:rachel@cechouston.org)

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**Global Community Leaders Collaborate on Local Solutions**

Houston, TX, July 9, 2013: An experienced international community leader will contribute to our local community through a four-month fellowship funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and implemented by IREX. The community leader will apply a global lens to issues facing the greater Houston region through practical work experience at the Citizens' Environmental Coalition while gaining transferable leadership and management skills he will later will apply back in his home country.

In its second year the Community Solutions Program has matched 58 global leaders with American organizations in more than 20 U.S. States and the District of Columbia. Through hands-on collaboration, more than 55 American organizations will provide their leaders with community development experience in the U.S. in one of four topic areas: tolerance and conflict resolution, women's issues, environmental issues, and transparency and accountability. Community leaders, with up to 15 years of experience, will volunteer their time and perspectives to finding innovative solutions to local challenges.

Community leader, Sophany Touch of Cambodia, has over five years of experience working on projects related to environmental preservation, community development and natural resource protection. As the Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) Community Development Officer at Wildlife Alliance in Chi Phat, Cambodia, he is involved in promoting conservation values throughout the CBET process and activities. As a vital part of Wildlife Alliance, his work focuses on environmental conservation and poverty alleviation by empowering and strengthening local communities and engaging them to build their capacity for environmental conservation. Sophany provides training for the local community to be able to independently operate their own tourism project in order to generate income. He has experience in project management, monitoring and evaluating the impacts of CBET Project, as well as using social media tools as a marketing strategy to promote the Chi Phat CBET and advocacy initiatives. He holds a BA in Business Management from Build Bright University and a Diploma in Teaching Pedagogy from Stung Treng Teacher Training Centre, Cambodia. Upon returning from the Community Solutions Program Fellowship, he plans to focus her work on identifying the existing and future threats of food security for local people, continue the activities of climate change adaptation/deduction and to increase the effectiveness of natural resource use and natural conservation within Chi Phat community of Southwestern Cardamoms, Koh Kong Province, Cambodia. At the Citizens' Environmental Coalition in Houston, Touch will work with local environmental and economic development organizations to help develop local ecotourism programs. He will also participate in efforts relating to food security, climate change, and natural resource conservation.

In addition to working at local organizations, community leaders participate in an online Community Leadership Institute, a web-based leadership course developed by IREX that focuses on key leadership and organizational management skills. Leaders will leave the U.S. not only with skills and strong connections to their colleagues at their host organizations, but also with a strong global network that will strengthen their community engagement.

At the end of their time in the U.S., community leaders create a plan for a new initiative in their home communities and spend six months implementing that project. Collaboration with their host organizations at a distance ensures that the learning continues.

For more information, please visit <http://www.irex.org/project/community-solutions>.

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally. We enable local individuals and institutions to build key elements of a vibrant society: quality education, independent media, and strong communities. To strengthen these sectors, our programs include conflict resolution, technology for development, gender, and youth.

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State fosters mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries to promote friendly, and peaceful relations, as mandated by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961.

The Citizens' Environmental Coalition is an alliance of nonprofit, governmental, and educational organizations whose work impacts our environment and quality of life in the Houston-Galveston region. Since its incorporation in 1971, the CEC's mission has been to foster dialogue, education, and collaboration on environmental issues in the Houston/Gulf Coast region. For more information, visit [www.cechouston.org](http://www.cechouston.org).

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