MAY 14, 1960 | The East-West Center is formally established by an act of Congress, spearheaded by Hawai‘i’s then-Territorial congressional representative John A. Burns and then-Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson.

MAY 9, 1961 | Johnson, Burns and other EWC founders participate in a groundbreaking ceremony for the center’s first buildings, designed by then-budding, Chinese-born architectural star I.M. Pei.

1964 | The Center’s signature Japanese garden at Jefferson Hall is blessed by Japan’s then-Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko with a traditional release of koi into the garden stream.

1967 | King of Thailand presents a Royal Thai Pavilion, known as a sala, as a gift to the EWC — the only sala outside of Thailand personally dedicated by the King.

MID-1970s | The East-West Center is a major early sponsor of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and the building of the voyaging canoe, Hokule’a.

1973 | S. Ann Dunham, mother of Barack Obama, joins the EWC’s Technology and Development Institute as a graduate degree fellow in anthropology.

1975 | A new EWC charter creates an independent, international Board of Governors.

1979 | EWC welcomes first scholarship student from People’s Republic of China.

1980 | Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders meets at the EWC. Fiji Prime Minister Ratu Mara speaks at Center.

1981 | Hawai‘i International Film Festival begins as an East-West Center project.

1982 | Japan Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki speaks at EWC on “The Coming of the Pacific Age.” ◆ EWC Foundation established to diversify EWC funding base and increase scholarship awards.

1984 | First Premier of the People’s Republic of China to visit the U.S., Zhao Ziyang, delivers his first U.S. public address at EWC.


1988 | United States Secretary of State George P. Shultz speaks at EWC on “U.S. Policy and the Dynamism of the Pacific.”

1989 | Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara speaks at EWC on “The Cold War: Can We End It? Should We Try?”

1990 | President George H.W. Bush convenes a United States-Pacific Islands Summit held at the East-West Center. This is the first time that a U.S. president has a joint meeting with the heads of government in the Pacific Islands.

1994 | Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan visit the EWC, revisiting the Japanese Garden they helped to establish.


1997 | Pacific Islands Report begins via the internet—the first reliable, regional source of Pacific Islands news.

2000 | U.S. President Bill Clinton and Okinawa Governor Keiichi Inamine formally announce the start of EWC’s Obuchi Program at the Cornerstone of Peace, named in honor of former Prime Minister Kenzo Obuchi. The Obuchi Education and Research Program includes graduate scholarships for Okinawans, internships, intellectual exchanges, and EWC facilitation of research activities in Okinawa. ◆ Over 31 governments make contributions to EWC programs and activities.

“The East-West Center is here to serve the world. To this Center we shall bring the wise men of the west and we shall invite the wise men of the east. From them we shall hope that many generations of young scholars will learn the wisdom of the two worlds, united here, and to use that wisdom for the purposes and the ends of mankind’s highest aspirations for peace and justice and freedom.”

President Lyndon B. Johnson
2001 | EWC in Washington established.

- Asia Pacific Leadership Program is established through a $4.5 million grant from the Freeman Foundation.
- The International Forum for Education 2020 is established.

2002 | EWC hosts the 25-nation Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum.

2003 | U.S. President George W. Bush, accompanied by White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, and James Kelly, assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, meets with 13 Pacific Island Leaders during the seventh annual Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders convened by the East-West Center.

2004 | Corazon Aquino, former president of the Philippines, receives the third Asia Pacific Community Building Award from EWC and delivers an address on the “People Power Movement.”
- Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program starts bringing students from provincial areas of Asian nations to EWC.
- EWC establishes the United States Asia Pacific Council (USAPC) with support from the U.S. Department of State.

2005 | EWC becomes the first institution in the U.S. to establish a tsunami relief fund, raising more than $500,000 to assist victims of the devastating Asian tsunami.
- Education program enters an agreement to support students and faculty of the Ar-Raniry State Institute for Islamic Studies in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.
- President of Mongolia speaks at EWC on “Mongolia: At the Juncture Between Northeast and Central Asia.”

2006 | Lyonpo Jigmi Yoser Thinley, cultural affairs minister and former prime minister of Bhutan, delivers a speech on “Gross National Happiness,” the political philosophy of his country.
- International alumni conference of 550 alumni from 36 countries in Hanoi, Vietnam marks rapidly expanding alumni chapter network.
- EWC expands its Asian Muslim Initiative to address misconceptions and misunderstandings that have arisen between Asia’s Islamic societies and the U.S.

2007 | Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders convenes in Washington, D.C. for the first time. The 20 leaders of Pacific islands governments meet with top congressional leaders, private sector executives and State Department officials, including U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Karen Hughes, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.
- Asian International Justice Initiative (AIJI) conducts trainings in international law for the officers of the international Khmer Rouge tribunal in Cambodia and also produces videos to teach the people of Cambodia about international legal processes.

2008 | Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn dedicates the newly reconstructed Royal Sala Thai pavilion and accepts the EWC’s Asia Pacific Community Building Award on behalf of her father, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.
- EWC in Washington launches new website on U.S.-Asia interactions — Asia Matters for America.
- First EWC International Media Conference is held in Bangkok attracting some 200 journalists from 21 nations.

2009 | EWC, in partnership with the U.S. and Federated States of Micronesia governments, coordinates a delegation of election observers for the national and state elections in the Federated Sates of Micronesia.

2010 | East-West Center celebrates its 50th anniversary year.
- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton delivers two major Asia Pacific policy addresses hosted by the East-West Center.
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The East-West Center contributes to a peaceful, prosperous, and just Asia Pacific community by serving as a vigorous hub for cooperative research, education, and dialogue on critical issues of common concern to the Asia Pacific region and the United States.

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