



# MERCED YOUTH CONNECT

Shaping today's youth for tomorrow's success through love, laughter and learning

## City of Merced Proposal for Community Funding Merced Youth Connect Sustainability Plan 2022 June 30, 2022

From September to May of 2022, several members of the MYC Executive Leadership Team accepted the opportunity to participate in a facilitated learning cohort of emerging organizations sponsored by Merced County First Five and hosted by staff from HandsOn Central California. The purpose was to facilitate the thoughtful development of a plan for ongoing sustainability, as participating organizations navigate the post-COVID landscape. **MYC is proud to have successfully completed the cohort coursework and final presentation of a formal, comprehensive plan for sustainability.** A copy of the final Sustainability Plan has been included in this proposal.

The plan focuses on growth in three key areas; expanding the capacity of the Board of Directors, reintroducing the MYC App to community members post-COVID and reestablishing our connection to the community through a robust volunteer engagement program. Community funding through the City of Merced will be used to meet our goal of reintroducing the MYC App to community members. Funding from Merced County First 5 and private fundraising will be used to accomplish objectives in two remaining areas of focus.

The framework for our marketing and outreach plan has been established, with a formalized plan scheduled for completion in August 2022. While digital outreach and social media tools will be a critical component, the backbone of our outreach plan is to invest in the in-person connection we promote to Users of the MYC App. We will be meeting with trusted local service providers to establish a visual marketing presence throughout the city and establishing a connection with local businesses listed on the App to co-promote. **MYC will partner with the City of Merced to also promote the vitality of the Merced Connect App and services available to residents through the Department of Parks and Community Services. This includes the creation and distribution of high quality promotional video and digital marketing assets, as well as delivery of physical marketing material to relevant city locations, and high visibility placement of City of Merced priority listings within the MYC App.**

Resilient and agile, the MYC family is eager to step into the future with sharpened focus. We have done the work openly and honestly to create a clearly defined, realistic plan for growth and sustainability. Our organization will need the financial support of committed funders to implement this plan successfully. We are seeking partnerships that align with MYC's mission of building a stronger community and inspiring future generations.

**MYC is seeking \$8,000 from the City of Merced Community Funding** to purchase marketing and outreach material that will support the accomplishment of the first goal outlined in our Sustainability Plan, increasing MYC App Downloads and number of times access by each User.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

**Emily Tolsma, Chief Communications Officer**

## **Organizational Capacity**

Merced Youth Connect is a local, non-profit organization committed to serving families in Merced. Our organization was founded in late 2016 by a small but passionate team working to bridge the gap between youth in Merced and local service providers.

Our Board of Directors currently includes six founding members, all volunteering to contribute time and effort and we continue to learn and build together. This skilled group of individuals from diverse personal backgrounds partner to bring expertise from the social service, criminal justice, workforce development, housing, financial and public health sectors. **In collaboration, our team reflects the diversity of the community that we serve and is an extraordinary example of the strength and value of connection in Merced County.**

## **Our Team**

### **Emily Tolsma, Chief Communications Officer**

Emily Tolsma is Chief Communications Officer and current President of the Board. Her vision to develop an accessible, web-based platform where youth and families could easily access information about local events is largely the inspiration for the founding of Merced Youth Connect. Emily was born and raised in Merced, leaving only to earn her degree in Communications from CSU Monterey Bay. She is a proud local and her commitment to community is infectious.

During her 13 years of employment with the County of Merced, she has gained valuable experience working as a case manager and staff development trainer serving some of Merced County's most vulnerable families. In that role, she is known for her resourcefulness and creativity.

### **Greg Culot, Chief Financial Officer**

Greg Culot is the Founding and current Chief Financial Officer of MYC and appointed Treasurer of the Board. Greg's eye for accuracy and genuine passion for fiscal responsibility make him an invaluable member of our Board. Greg contributes invaluable experience from both private and public sectors to our efforts. Greg holds a degree in Communications has been a Certified Public Accountant since 2016 and has been employed in fiscal management in Merced County for over a decade.

### **Delray Shelton, Founding Executive Member of the Board**

Born and raised in Merced County, Sergeant Delray Shelton attended Golden Valley High School before earning his undergraduate degree from UI&U and his graduate degree from CSU Stanislaus. He is currently the Operations Sergeant for the Merced County Sheriff's Office and serves as the Merced City Councilmember for District 6. Delray's friendly smile, casual nature and professional communication style make him ideal for working diplomatically with our community partners and public agencies.

### **Matt Serratto, Founding Executive Member of the Board**

Merced's current Mayor and previous Council Member for District 5, Matt Serratto has served as an Executive Board Member for MYC since the beginning in 2016. He provides sound legal advice and an intimate knowledge of the people and places that make Merced special.

### **Shavon Roach, Founding Executive Member of the Board**

Shavon's inspiring story is a perfect reflection of the difficult circumstances children in our county face, but also of the resiliency of the human spirit and enduring power of love through service.

Shavon credits her connection to resources, supportive relationships with professional, encouraging adults and sheer personal determination for her ability to overcome the challenges of her early life. She is currently working hard to support young families as a Home Visitor through the MCOE and hopes to utilize her skills as an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Curriculum Facilitator, a Victim Offender Reconciliation Program Certified Mediator and a career Educator to develop direct service through MYC.

### **Julie Kellum, Founding Executive Member of the Board**

A true daughter of Merced, Julie Kellum was born and raised in Merced, where she currently works for the Merced County Human Services Agency. Julie has experience as a Job Readiness Facilitator and CalLEARN Case Manager, supporting young parents and job seekers in our community. Julie's flair for the dramatic, generous and open spirit and willingness to engage with anyone make her great for outreach and engagement.

### **Pao Saechao, Founding Executive Member of the Board**

Pao Saechao was born in a Thai refugee camp before his family immigrated to the United States in late 1979. They moved to Merced in 1985 and Pao graduated from Golden Valley High School before earning his B.S. in Business Administration from Georgetown University. Pao is committed to promoting access to resources for underserved families in Merced County.

## **Projects**

### **The MYC App**

The original effort of MYC was simply to foster connections to activities, services and opportunities for youth in our community. This led to the development and implementation of the Merced Youth Connect App, live in 2017. Free and easy-to-use, the MYC app features 250 individual listings in 29 different sections. Families have fast, convenient access to Merced's only comprehensive listing of local businesses, clubs, sports leagues, programs and events specifically serving youth and families.

More deeply, the MYC App is a community-minded response to the local legend "there's nothing to do in Merced." The intention was to begin a community conversation about what *is* available, special, unique, **ours**. The App is a vehicle that we use to engage in the process of building relationships with collaborators, prove our commitment to the community and grow capacity on our board.

While the COVID-19 pandemic essentially rendered the MYC App irrelevant, the essential work of building relationships, commitment and capacity continued; and new opportunities to support equity and inclusion emerged. Starting in 2020, MYC began serving as Fiscal Sponsor for smaller programs and organizations engaged specifically in work addressing racial disparities and growing inclusive programming. Our contribution focused on working one-on-one with these direct service providers to develop standardized accounting and reporting protocols, and build sound financial systems for the future. We shared lessons learned through our journey including resources for operating a 501c3, board development and communication. We built trusted partnerships and supported successful transitions from sponsorship to independent program management.

## **MYC App Financial Support**

- Merced Sunrise Rotary (2020) \$1,000
- County of Merced District 2 Discretionary Funding (2019) \$5,000
- City of Merced Community Funding (2019) \$2,500
- Community Foundation of Merced County (2019) \$1,000
- First 5 Mini-Grant (2019) \$3,000

## **Fiscal Sponsorships**

- Play Adventures (2019) \$8,000 – Funds used to host free pop-up parks events featuring the ‘play your way’ philosophy.
- Enhancing Community Well-being across Differences (2019) \$10,000 – Funds received used to formalize a Train-the-Trainer Curriculum and collaborate with MCOE to lead cohorts of community members through curriculum to address basic health needs and current challenges like COVID-19.
- Hmong Culture Camp (2020/2021) \$51,000 – Funds received used for program costs of in-person and virtual Hmong Culture Camp experience focused on social-emotional development, Hmong-English Dual Literacy, and Hmong heritage and culture for children ages 0 – 5.

## **Project Description**

After years of disconnection due to COVID-19, in-person events and services have resumed and families are seeking easy-to-access information about what local events, services and opportunities exist and are available. MYC will actively promote the MYC App as the solution to three specific target populations:

- Families, Parents of school-aged children
- Employees of family-serving organizations
- Students

## **Goals**

1. Increase number of App Downloads (1,000 new Users by July 2023)
2. Increase number of times the App is access by each User (2 times monthly per active User)

## **Objectives**

- Create comprehensive marketing and outreach plan to include specific language and branding relevant to each target population
- Saturate locations where families can be expected to spend time with MYC table-top marketing material, including local medical offices (pediatricians, OBGYN, child specialists) and child care providers
- Refresh relationships with providers listed on the App, provide MYC branded marketing merchandise and material for use in both customer and employee spaces
- Establish a more formalized connection to local family-serving organizations, offering to share information in person or in print at staff meetings, New Employee Orientations and internal newsletters (Dignity Health, County of Merced, MCOE, MCSD, MUHSD, UC Merced, Hyatt El Capitan/Mainzer)
- Build relationships with local educational institutions to explore opportunities to share desktop version of MYC App on student Chromebooks or other internal resource

## Key Milestones

### Phase 1

August 31, 2022

Completion of comprehensive marketing and outreach plan to include specific language and branding relevant to each target population. Work on this milestone has already begun with in-kind support from local marketing professionals.

### Phase 2

September 30, 2022

Order and delivery of marketing material including table-top signs, branded office supplies and in-print advertising.

### Phase 3

February 28, 2023

Outreach and delivery of marketing material.

### Phase 4

May 31, 2023

Evaluation of marketing and outreach plan impact with input and feedback from target populations and MYC App analytics.

Initiate formalized relationships; develop opportunities for student direct access to MYC App.

## Budget

Item	In-Kind	Other Funding Sources	City Funding
Marketing Consulting, brand development (HandsOn Central CA and Patricia Pratt)	\$1,000	\$1,500	
Spanish and Hmong Translation of marketing language	\$500		
Table-Top Signs			\$4,000
Branded Office Supplies		\$1,500	\$1,500
Branded Promotional Products		\$1,500	\$1,500
In-Print Advertising		\$1,500	\$1,000
Digital Advertising (Dutch House Media)	\$1,000		\$2,000
Volunteer Incentives		\$1,000	
<b>Total Grant Request from City</b>			<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Total Funds from Other Sources</b>	<b>\$2,500</b>	<b>\$7,000</b>	
<b>Total Project Cost</b>			<b>\$19,500</b>

## References

Merced County First Five

Scott Waite, Executive Director

260 East 15<sup>th</sup> Street

Merced, CA 95341

(209) 385-7337

Projects: 2022 Sustainability Cohort, 2022 Mini-Grant and 2019 Mini-Grant (MYC App)

Hmong Culture Camp

Bouasvanh Lor, Executive Director

4925 Webber Court

Merced, CA 95348

(209) 631-4919

Projects: Hmong Culture Camp 2020/2021

Enhancing Community Well-Being across Differences

Lee Lor, Merced County Board of Supervisors, District 2 (2017 – 2020)

(209) 761 – 6679

Projects: District 2 Discretionary Funding (MYC App, Enhancing Community Well-Being across Differences and Play Adventures)

## Contact Information

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**MERCED**  

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**YOUTH CONNECT**

**SUSTAINABILITY**  
**PLAN**

**JUNE 2022**

# INTRODUCTION

**Merced Youth Connect** is a local, non-profit organization committed to serving **families in Merced**.

Our organization was founded in late 2016 by a **small but passionate** team working to **bridge the gap between youth in Merced and local service providers**.

Our **Board of Directors** currently includes six founding members, all volunteering to contribute time and effort and we continue to learn and build together. This **skilled group** of individuals from **diverse personal backgrounds** partner to bring expertise from the social service, criminal justice, workforce development, housing, financial and public health sectors.

In collaboration, **our team reflects the diversity of the community that we serve** and is an **extraordinary example of the strength and value of connection** in Merced County.



## MYC

## VISION

**Shaping today's youth for tomorrow's success through love, laughter and learning.**

## MISSION

**We use the creative power of the arts, education and strengths-based collaboration to build a stronger community and inspire future generations.**

# OUR STORY SO FAR

The original effort of MYC was simply to **foster connections to activities, services and opportunities for youth** in our community.

This led to the development and implementation of the **Merced Youth Connect App**, live in 2017. Free and easy-to-use, the MYC app features over 250 individual listings in 29 different sections. **Families have fast, convenient access to Merced's only comprehensive listing of local businesses, clubs, sports leagues, programs and events specifically serving youth and families.**

More deeply, the **MYC App is a community-minded** response to the local legend "there's nothing to do in Merced." The intention was to begin a **community conversation** about what **is** available, special, unique, *ours*.

**The App is a vehicle that we use to engage in the process of building relationships with collaborators, prove our commitment to the community and grow capacity on our board.**

## THE PIVOT

While the COVID-19 pandemic essentially rendered the MYC App irrelevant, the essential work of building relationships, commitment and capacity continued; and new **opportunities to support equity and inclusion** emerged.

Starting in 2020, MYC began serving as Fiscal Sponsor for smaller programs and organizations engaged specifically in **work addressing racial disparities and growing inclusive programming.**

Our contribution focused on **working one-on-one with these direct service providers** to develop standardized accounting and reporting protocol and **build sound financial systems for the future.** We **shared lessons learned** through our journey including resources for operating a 501c3, board development and communication.

We built **trusted partnerships and supported successful transitions** from sponsorship to independent program management.

**Resilient and agile**, the MYC family is eager to step into the future with sharpened focus. **We have done the work openly and honestly to create a clearly defined, realistic plan for growth and sustainability.**

Our organization will **need the financial support of committed funders** to implement this plan successfully. We are seeking **partnerships** that align with MYC's mission of building a stronger community and inspiring future generations.

# THE APP

Simply, COVID. Total App downloads decreased by 75% in 2020. MYC will utilize First 5 Mini-Grant Funding to pay for MYC App software subscription through 2023 and implement a **targeted marketing campaign to acquire new Users and encourage current Users to rediscover the App.**

The average age of Merced County residents is 31.2 years old. Thirty-seven percent of residents are under the age of 18. Generally, **Merced is a young community.** This includes **families** settled in an affordable community with some amenities, **newcomers** associated with the UC, and **life-long residents** with deep roots and generational connections to the area.

Local service providers, small businesses and anchoring institutions all **battle to speak authentically and efficiently to large audiences** in an environment where access points are often unfamiliar and **word-of-mouth has long been the only proven dispatch.**

More than just listings, the **MYC App** communicates in a voice that is **local, customized and inclusive.** It is an **invitation** to join, to lead, to belong, *here.*

## GOAL

**Increase number of MYC App Downloads,** number of times accessed; and positive impact reported by User

## OBJECTIVES

- Develop **comprehensive outreach strategy** to identify and target specific populations (Users and Listings)
- Seek **partnerships with family-serving institutions** including County of Merced, City of Merced Parks & Rec Department, Merced County Office of Education and Merced City School District to advertise MYC App directly to families
- **Optimize MYC App functionality** to include desktop computer accessibility and language translation

## RESOURCES

- **Merced First 5 Mini-Grant**
- Informal but reliable **network connections** to key decision-makers in local family-serving institutions
- **Technological infrastructure** to increase App functionality

# THE BOARD

One of MYC's great strengths is the **quality and commitment** of our Board of Directors. As we navigate our organization through its sixth year of existence and evaluate realistic goals for the future; we honor the **hard work and creativity** that has laid the foundation and carried us this far, but also recognize the limits that relying on a **working board of volunteers** presents.

**Now is the time to celebrate our connection to each other, renew our connection to the mission and expand our connection to the community.**

GOAL	OBJECTIVES
<p>Build <b>organizational infrastructure and capacity</b> for program development and implementation</p> <p><b>Reestablish connection</b> to the MYC Story and evaluate relevance post-COVID</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Reengage current Board Members</b> through high quality events that promote togetherness, renew excitement for the mission and encourage contribution</li><li>• Develop new Board Member <b>recruitment material</b></li><li>• <b>Recruit 1 – 3 new Board Members</b>, at least one with Volunteer Engagement experience</li><li>• Create and operationalize stakeholder <b>feedback loops</b> that consistently collect and integrate new information into ongoing system development</li></ul>
RESOURCES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TNT Fireworks <b>Fundraiser</b> (June/July 2022)</li><li>• Quorum of <b>current Board Members with capacity to sustain leadership</b> commitment through multi-year plan period</li></ul>	

# THE COMMUNITY

The foundation is built for MYC to expand, but to truly grow and thrive we will need to be **owned by and absorbed into the larger community**. For an organization focused on connection, **this part of our journey is critical**.

We need to **ask essential questions** about what motivates someone to contribute in this way and **learn what they need** from this experience for it to be meaningful. A **framework that supports connection** along a continuum and accommodates the needs of contributors will be developed. **The relationship is why we are doing it**.

## GOAL

**Build a community of motivated Volunteers** who can commit to contributing 5-10 hours monthly to MYC outreach, events, network engagement and App updates

## OBJECTIVES

- Establish **Volunteer Subcommittee**
- Develop systematic **framework for recruiting and engaging Volunteers**
- **Actively recruit potential Volunteers**, provide ongoing opportunities for communication, contribution, engagement and growth
- **Seek feedback** particularly from experienced Volunteers to further develop the Volunteer Experience, focus on the needs of Volunteers
- Integrate **Volunteer feedback** into larger organizational protocol

## RESOURCES

- Direct **communication opportunity** with current **App Users**
- **Reputation as a trusted community partner**
- **Potential partnership** with Americorps Volunteer Infrastructure Project to **employ 1 full-time staff person**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Merced Youth Connect is grateful to Merced County First Five for the opportunity to participate in the 9-month Sustainability Cohort.

We leave our time together with a completed, multi-year **plan for sustainability** and have access to a **valuable cache of connections and resources** to reference as we continue to evolve.

We will **continue to grow our relationship** with Carol Davies, Tish Stanley and the team at **HandsOn Central California** as we work to collaborate with Americorps VIP and seek the funding necessary to support a paid staff position.

We also look forward to **continued engagement with our Cohort partner participants** and are excited to contribute to the strength and impact our **community-based partnerships**.

## Merced Youth Connect

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## Emily Tolsma

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**MERCED**  
**YOUTH CONNECT**

**WE THANK YOU**  
**FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT**