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Manuel J Alvarado

March 4, 2022

**Introductory Letter from Authorized Representative**

**Applicant 501c3:**

United Way of Merced County, 531 W Main Street, Merced, CA, 95340  
Manuel Alvarado, CEO, Main (209) 383-4242, Direct (209) 384-1205,  
[ceo@unitedwaymerced.org](mailto:ceo@unitedwaymerced.org)

**Community Funding 2022-2023 Proposal Name:**  
Merced City Stewardship Council

Dear City of Merced Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to propose a request for Community Funding for 2022-2022. For over 68 years, the United Way of Merced County has been serving our community through our mission of connecting people, resources, and organizations to create a thriving community for everyone. Our motto is "Live United." One way we live our mission is by providing a safe, neutral setting and support for people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to dialogue, learn, and build relationships together. We believe this function is vital to developing a healthy and prosperous community where all residents can be valued and contribute to the greater common good.

We ask for funding to develop a sustainable **Merced City Stewardship Council**. This project draws on over 20 years of work and lessons by myself and my project partner, Dr. Stergios (Steve) Roussos, serving the needs for community development and civic engagement in Merced and the broader San Joaquin Valley. More specifically, this proposal was stimulated by encouragement and enthusiasm by City Council and staff at the Saturday, February 19, 2022, special meeting to discuss the City Council's goals and priorities related to the recent \$27.4 Million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). While listening to Public Comments during this meeting, Dr. Roussos saw a pattern. Well-meaning, passionate city residents were providing good ideas. But their approach often used anger, anxiety, and blaming, which distracted from their ideas being understood. Some residents did not have clear speaking skills and were nervous, which is natural for anyone without practice. Some of the Public Comments were misplaced, as they were for items that the City team did not have authority to discuss or act on (e.g., a concern that was under the authority of School Districts or outside city limits). Some residents' comments ran



longer than the 3-minute time allocation, preventing the Council from hearing a complete idea or recommendation.

These challenges and limitations during Public Comments were not new. Dr. Roussos saw these for years in his participation at City Council and other public meetings. During COVID, with increased stressors on residents and businesses, many residents approached City Council during Public Comments with ideas and calls to action. Too often, residents' valuable and worthy ideas get lost because of their challenges to communicate and lack of understanding of how to engage in local decision-making.

In contrast to these challenges faced by our residents, the overall sense of hope and promise of the City Council's ARPA priorities sparked Dr. Roussos to ask the City Council to support a new idea. Dr. Roussos asked the City Council to consider allocating a portion of the ARPA funding for a program to support city residents learning, preparation, and communication of their ideas more effectively during Public Comment and other City Council public engagement opportunities. If we could improve city residents' ability and capacity to communicate and engage with the City Council, then we might be able to impact all ongoing ARPA work and other city improvements related to getting back on track in a world with COVID-19.

In response to Dr. Roussos' idea that day, all City Council members and the City Manager offered supportive comments, noted that this idea aligned with their goals, and recommended that he propose a project for Community Funding. Dr. Roussos returned to the United Way (his home base for nonprofit projects since 2007) to plan a project with me. Dr. Roussos and I have known and worked together since 2005 during my time at the Great Valley Center, the American Leadership Forum, and Merced's center of the Sierra Health Foundation. We both had experience with a program I developed and led for over ten years, the Great Valley Center's Institute for the Development of Emerging Area Leaders (IDEAL). IDEAL was a regional leadership program for the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys. It taught participants ("fellows") how to make collaborative community decisions about public affairs and educated them about land use, economics, agriculture, and conservation in the San Joaquin Valley. And we both had experience developing and leading dozens of programs and training for civic engagement with diverse communities with attention to socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers.

The Merced City Stewardship Council proposal builds on our lessons and experiences over two decades. Our goals for 2022-2023 are to develop and implement the Stewardship Council so that it can be sustained on its own beyond the Community Funding. Residents who complete training and support through the Stewardship Council will be "City Stewards" who can advance our community through their ideas, passion, and love for our city.

Thank you for this opportunity to work with the City of Merced to improve the quality of life for our residents. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Roussos with any questions.

Sincerely,



Manuel J. Alvarado, CEO

### **Illustration of Work Within the Past 5 Years**

The United Way of Merced County leads and helps others lead dozens of projects each year. These three projects offer an example of the reach and impact of this work.

#### **IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program**

Year(s) implemented: 2012– present.

Project description: VITA is a grant program of the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to support the underserved's free tax preparation service through various partner organizations. United Way has been the lead for Merced County's VITA since its beginnings. Volunteers speak English, Spanish, Hmong, and other languages as needed to help residents file their taxes. People served are low- to moderate-income individuals, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and limited English speakers to file their taxes each year. In 2021, the total value of individual rebates received by local participants in Merced's VITA program was \$1,236,000. This funding was a significant source of support during COVID for individuals, families, and our community.

Location(s) served: Merced County

Cost of services: \$33,020

Program contact: Jonathan Towell, Director of Finance, [jtowell@unitedwaymerced.org](mailto:jtowell@unitedwaymerced.org)

#### **COVID-19 RISE UNITED**

Year(s) implemented: 2020-present.

Project description: RISE UNITED was a region-wide project led by the United Way of California for the seven counties of the San Joaquin Valley funded by an anonymous donor. Merced County was awarded 1.4 million dollars to address the overwhelming needs created because of the COVID-19 widespread impacts on our communities and underserved populous. Of the 1.4 million we funded over 30 nonprofit stabilization grants; over 4,500 families with emergency assistance; 2,100 distance learning for rural students; 13,779 households assisted; over 200 senior food deliveries; 75,00 pounds of food disbursed and over 23,000 individuals supplied with 85,000 PPE items.

Location(s) served: Merced County

Cost of services: \$1,425,000.00

Program contact: Rob Hypes, Community Impact Manager, [roberth@unitedwaymerced.org](mailto:roberth@unitedwaymerced.org)

#### **You & Me COVID-Free**

Year(s) implemented: 2021.

Project description: You & Me COVID-Free was a nationwide Duke University School of Medicine project led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Merced County was selected as one of the locations to invest in because of our greater need for healthcare resources during COVID. Dr. Roussos helped channel the project to the United Way as the lead for this project. The United Way distributed over 200,000 free test kits (400,000 actual tests) in Merced County between Mid-November through December 2021. Tests reached our most vulnerable residents and directly helped to prevent and control the harm of COVID-19.

Location(s) served: Merced County

Cost of services: \$302,000

Program contact: Rob Hypes, Community Impact Manager, [roberth@unitedwaymerced.org](mailto:roberth@unitedwaymerced.org)

## **Proposal for the City of Merced Community Funding 2022-2023**

Applicant: United Way of Merced County  
Project Name: Merced City Stewardship Council

### **Individual Staff Experiences**

**Manuel Alvarado**, United Way of Merced County, CEO will serve as the Council Co-Director to support and integrate the Stewardship Council within the family of United Way programs. This will include space, supplies, and other indirect operational costs, hiring and supervising the Council Coordinator (to be hired), and helping to develop, evaluate and ensure the program's quality and impact. Mr. Alvarado has over 30 years of expertise in community development, leadership program development, organizational development and administration, and grants and contracts management. He has developed and led several similar community and civic engagement programs for the Great Valley Center. Mr. Alvarado has been a staff member (CEO) of the United Way. He is respected and trusted by Merced leaders, residents, and decision-makers for his commitment and effectiveness for the City of Merced.

**Stergios (Steve) Roussos, PhD, MPH**, will serve as the Council Co-Director. He will co-manage the project and Council Coordinator with Mr. Alvarado. He will lead program curricula and training development, oversee program recruitment and outreach (including different languages and cultures), liaison between the Council and City Council and staff, and lead program monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Dr. Roussos has over 30 years of experience in community-based research, development, and advocacy. Since 2001 in Merced, he has led and co-led dozens of collaborative initiatives and programs to help establish and grow UC Merced (in particular community-engaged research and student-led research), school and county initiatives (e.g., Business Education Alliance Merced, Children's Movement, Merced Ahead, Community Partnership Alliance), and Merced City initiatives to close gaps and improve equity for culturally and linguistically underserved communities (e.g., original planning member of Building Healthy Communities, co-founder of Healthy House, co-founder of Hlub Hmong Center). Dr. Roussos has been a partner with fiscally sponsored projects at the United Way since 2007. Dr. Roussos is grateful for the opportunities to be a servant leader and passionate advocate for the City of Merced.

**Council Coordinator. To be determined.** The Council Coordinator will be an individual with extensive experience and strong relationships with civic leaders and residents of Merced, strong knowledge and skills in civic engagement (especially with community members experiencing social, cultural, and linguistic challenges), and a superb history in project management and quality assurance for community-based programs similar to the Stewardship Council.

## **Proposed Project & Scope of Services**

### **Project start-end dates:**

July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023

### **Goal:**

Establish a sustainable, community-based and -led process for training, supporting, and mentoring Merced City residents to effectively communicate their ideas, concerns, and recommendations during Public Comment or other interactions with the City Council and city staff for community improvement initiatives.

### **Project Deliverables and Measurable Results:**

1. Increase the number of people who contribute to decisions, recommendations, and actions to improve and support our city in partnership with the City Council, staff, and other City Council stakeholders.
2. Decrease the number of times people interact less productively with the City Council and efforts to support our city (e.g., rude, disparaging, mean, unclear, misplaced, etc., input and comments).
3. Create a vibrant Community of Practice (the Stewardship Council) where residents support individual and collective work as City Stewards for civic engagement and prosperity for the City of Merced.

### **Project Activities and Timeline for the Stewardship Council:**

#### **1. Recruit and prepare Council Coaches**

*(July – August, first cohort of 5, then ongoing throughout the project to have at least ten active Council Coaches at any time)*

Council Coaches will be volunteer residents and stakeholders of the City of Merced with expertise to train, coach, mentor, and support "City Stewards" (those wishing to make public comments, etc.). Coaches will represent the various languages, cultures, and other forms of diversity important to our city. Examples include former City Council members, local members/alumni of the American Leadership Forum, Leadership Merced, and similar leadership groups (e.g., service organizations like League of Women Voters, Kiwanis, Rotary, Soroptimist), and others from business, faith, and diverse sectors of our community. In developing this proposal, we reached out to some of these leaders, and they offered dozens of potential coaches with great enthusiasm for having a Stewardship Council. An initial workgroup will create a process with criteria for recruitment, selection, and participation of Council Coaches. As needed Coaches will be supported with potential challenges in participation such as transportation for Council activities, language interpreting and support, and other items to facilitate their participation.

#### **2. Recruit and prepare Council Liaisons**

*(July – August, first cohort of 5, then ongoing through the project period to have up to 20 active Council Liaisons at any time)*

Council Liaisons will be volunteer students from local post-secondary schools and local institutes of higher education who will help implement Stewardship Council activities (e.g., marketing, event and training, monitoring and evaluation, reporting and dissemination of lessons

learned). They will be responsible for developing and maintaining a directory and database of lessons from the project, sources of referral and support for ideas generated by residents, and other operations of the Council. Liaisons will represent the various languages, cultures, and other forms of diversity important to our city. Local college and university partners of the Stewardship Council will help incorporate the Council's work into student clubs and organizations and campus curricula and courses. Over time, Liaisons will be instrumental as Coaches and lead the ongoing sustainability of the Council.

### **3. Create the Stewardship Council Guide**

*(July – September initial complete draft, with revisions online throughout the project)*

A Stewardship Council instruction manual will be created as an online wiki with easy print capabilities and computer, phone, and tablet access. A smaller Council workgroup will be responsible for the management of the Guide. Set up will allow any Council members to contribute and improve the Guide over time with their lessons, recommendation, and content development. The Guide will include user ratings and comments to identify and share successful case studies and examples as interactive sources of training. The Guide will be designed to be lay-friendly, low-literacy, and multi-lingual/cultural (with translations led by the "user community" representing the Stewardship Council).

### **4. Create the Stewardship Council Website**

*(July – initial launch, ongoing developments afterward)*

A Stewardship Council website will house the Guide, and provide the headquarters for all outreach, engagement, training, events, and member support for the Council. Professional website developers will be used to set up and provide ongoing support for the website, but in a way that Council volunteers can be the primary source of website management and implementation. The website will include a Discussion Forum and online training applications to support peer-to-peer and self-paced learning. The website will have a monitored, updated list of resources to support public speaking and civic engagement, including access to online courses and training.

### **5. Develop and implement a Stewardship Council training and support**

*(July – August, initial set of start-up training and monthly support, then ongoing development based on the recommendations and needs of residents, the City Council and other Council stakeholders)*

A Community of Practice will occur at the United Way conference area (531 W. Main Street) to provide regular training, feedback, and support for residents as "City Stewards." Meetings will occur in-person with Zoom access. Meetings will begin on a monthly basis and increase in frequency based on user demand. Language interpreting will be available in Spanish and Hmong as needed. The overall aim for the CP is to create a safe, nurturing environment for learning, relationships, and growing a community of shared values and goals. Food and refreshments will be provided to support participation.

"A Community of Practice (CP) is a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals. Communities of Practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance skills, habits, and other practices. Interaction on an ongoing basis is an important part of this. Many CP rely on face-to-face meetings as well as web-based collaborative environments to communicate, connect and conduct community activities."

(<https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/>). For

decades, CPs have been a practical, cost-effective, sustainable method for community members to collaborate as peers for shared learning and action.

The Stewardship Council CP will be focused on becoming effective City Stewards as measured by skills and actions to identify, share, and promote ideas that will move the City of Merced forward on its goals and priorities. The core skill will be communicating ideas during City Council meetings and other public opportunities for resident engagement. Council Coaches, Liaisons, and the Council Coordinator will be responsible for implementing the in-person CP meetings. Meeting days and times will be selected to accommodate the most people and prepare for City Council meetings (i.e., scheduled and special meetings of the City Council, City Committees, and other relevant public meetings). For example, CP meetings may occur on Thursday evenings to prepare people to speak at Monday City Council meetings. A core activity during the CP will be live practice and feedback. Residents will be able to sign up (in advance or at the meeting) for 3-minute Public Comments, get live feedback, and practice again with peers at the CP meeting. With permission, activities and case studies during CP meeting will be recorded and shared on the Council website and Discussion Forum for training purposes.

**6. Develop and manage ongoing critical reflection and refinement of the Stewardship Council with feedback from City Council, staff, and community stakeholders**  
*(July and throughout the project)*

The success of the Stewardship Council will depend on ongoing, real, critical reflection on its process and results. A smaller Council workgroup will create and implement an evaluation plan, including options for anonymous feedback through paper and online methods, including Spanish and Hong versions as appropriate. The City Council will be provided with names and training completion of residents who wish to identify themselves as City Stewards (benefactors of the Council's training and support). This will allow for a very public view and critique of the Council's results. With the support of Dr. Roussos (a 25-year community researcher), the evaluation plan of the Stewardship Council will provide quantitative and qualitative data on the success of implementation and impact on the Project Deliverables and Measurable Results (described earlier). Anonymous results will be shared publicly on the Council website, Discussion Forum, and at City Council meetings. The Stewardship Council leads (Alvarado and Roussos) will be proactive in working with the City Council and staff to ensure the Stewardship Council is a meaningful and effective resource for civic engagement and support for the prosperity of the City of Merced.

**Program Budget: July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Requested</b>	<b>Other Committed Funding</b>
<b><u>PERSONNEL</u></b>			
<b><u>Salaries/Wages</u></b>			
Project Co-Director (20% FTE)	\$24,960.00	\$12,480.00	\$12,480.00
Council Coordinator (100% FTE)	\$41,600.00	\$41,600.00	\$0.00
Total Salaries/Wages:	\$66,560.00	\$54,080.00	\$12,480.00
<b><u>Fringe Benefits</u></b>			
35%	\$23,296.00	\$18,928.00	\$4,368.00
Total Benefits:	\$23,296.00	\$18,928.00	\$4,368.00
Total Personnel Expenses:	\$89,856.00	\$73,008.00	\$16,848.00
<b><u>PROJECT DIRECT EXPENSES</u></b>			
Website Development Contract (initial site and 1-year support)	\$8,000.00	\$8,000.00	\$0.00
Interpreting and translation support	\$2,400.00	\$2,400.00	\$0.00
Conference Room Rental	\$3,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,000.00
Project materials and supplies: \$100 per month for printing, \$50 per month for office supplies	\$1,800.00	\$300.00	\$1,500.00
Local mileage/travel support: Uber support for in-City travel for participants struggling to attend (\$100 per month)	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00	\$0.00
Outreach and marketing: social media, flyers, posters at \$500 per month	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$0.00
Activity and event refreshments: estimated at \$300 per month	\$3,600.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,600.00
Participant incentives: \$500 per month for college/university "Council Liaisons"; \$500 per month for residents to support CP engagement)	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$0.00
TOTAL Operating Expenses:	\$32,500.00	\$27,400.00	\$5,100.00
TOTAL Program Expenses:	\$122,356.00	\$100,408.00	\$21,948.00
Other Expenses: indirect costs of 10% of total	\$10,040.80	\$10,040.80	\$0.00
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	\$132,396.80	\$110,448.80	\$21,948.00

## **References**

Robin DeLugan, University of California, Merced  
Professor of Anthropology, Faculty Director: Resource Center for Community Engaged  
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