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**Manuel J Alvarado**

April 29, 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)

**Fiscally sponsored group to implement the proposed program:**

Community Partnership Alliance, 936 W. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Merced, CA 95340

Stergios (Steve) Roussos, Coordinating Director, 209-489-9913,  
[sroussos5@gmail.com](mailto:sroussos5@gmail.com)

Community Funding 2022-2023 Project Name: **People's Promise**

Dear City of Merced Team, Dear City of Merced Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to propose a request for Community Funding for 2022-2023. Community Funding would support the growth of the **People's Promise** to provide dozens of community events serving youth, families, and the general community and hundreds of volunteer opportunities. All activities from the People's Promise enable local residents of all ages (current volunteers range from age 4 to 84 years-old) to both serve and receive nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods through the People's Garden, the People's Fridge, and the Pop-Up People's Pantry.

For over 67 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. One way we live our mission is by serving as a fiscal sponsor for grassroots community groups. We provide the administrative and financial services support to allow them to carry out their important work within their respective communities. One of our longest-sponsored grassroots groups (since 2009) is the Community Partnership Alliance (CPA) which will be the implementation team for this proposal. This letter provides a brief background on the CPA and our proposal.

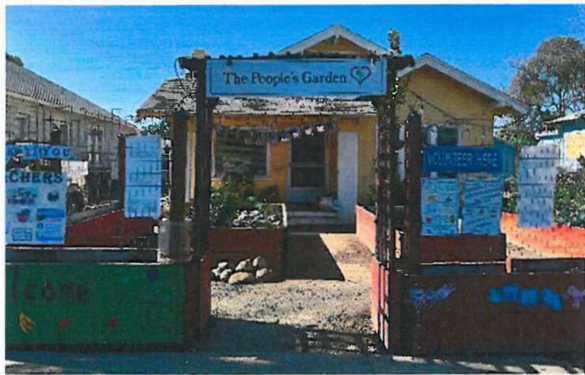
CPA launched in 2002 through a partnership between leaders from local community-based organizations and the University of California (UC), Merced. CPA is a grassroots multicultural initiative with the mission to improve social justice and equity in Merced County through the collaboration of local residents and higher education institutions. In 2003, CPA worked with UC

Merced to produce one of the few community-benefit agreements in the UC system, the Community Pledge (see this online). The Community Pledge has been guiding dozens of collaborative programs and initiatives to improve the quality of life of Merced while strengthening the relationship between residents and UC Merced. CPA is led by volunteers with paid staff contingent in grants and donations. Dr. Stergios (Steve) Roussos, a co-founder of CPA, serves as the Coordinating Director to guide the team, develop team members, and fundraise. All projects include a combination of community residents and university stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, faculty, alumni). They work together to identify, understand, and respond to local concerns and priorities. There have been many wonderful projects over the years, from local arts and recreation events, community and park clean-ups, surveys of town-gown events, and more.

The following are examples of projects related to this Community Funding proposal.

\* People's Garden, <https://www.facebook.com/MercedPeoplesGarden/>, Started in July 2018 with a \$6,000 grant by the Merced County Board of Supervisor District 2 Participatory Budget Fund ("Peoples' Budget"), Lee Lor (District 2 Board of Supervisor at the time), [mrsleelor@gmail.com](mailto:mrsleelor@gmail.com). The 18th Street People's Garden was selected through a vote of District 2 residents. The proposal for this grant was co-developed and written by UC Merced students and community members. Over 48 volunteers worked together to design and build all aspects of the community garden that has grown to be a source of pride for Merced neighbors and residents. Dozens of local businesses donated

materials and supplies. Dozens of volunteers and a small staff maintain the People's Garden to share produce and put on community events to promote gardening and nutrition. The People's Garden engages dozens of local volunteers each week to maintain vegetables, flowers, and fruit trees. The People's Garden has become a beautiful place to visit and serve food security needs in downtown Merced and surrounding neighborhoods.



\* Project Grow – Partners in Healthy Nutrition,

<https://www.facebook.com/ProjectGrowMerced/>, December 2018 – February 2021, \$75,000. Funded by the Central California Alliance for Health (CACH, Merced County’s Medi-Cal insurer), Cori Lambert, [grants@cach-alliance.org](mailto:grants@cach-alliance.org), (831) 430-5784. Project Grow was a proposal written and implemented by a team that formed out of the People’s Garden. The project purpose was to identify Medi-Cal members who are food insecure and to help them start home gardens and be part of community gardens, to participate in community events for nutrition and health, and to access local food support resources (e.g., WIC, SNAP, Food Bank). Over 1,500 people in the City of Merced participated in these in-person and online (due to COVID) events during the grant period, including many activities for young children (e.g., gardens in box, planter hand-painting, gardening workshops for families). This project was recently awarded \$50,000 from the Sierra Health Foundation to expand its activities.



\* Pop-Up People’s Pantry, <https://www.facebook.com/PopupPeoplesPantry/>, April 2020 – current, over \$42,000 to date. This project is funded by a Go Fund Me campaign, grassroots-fundraising, ongoing weekly donations, and in-kind support, with substantial resources from UC Merced’s Office of Sustainability. Contact Steve Roussos, [sroussos5@gmail.com](mailto:sroussos5@gmail.com), 209-489-9913 and Erin Meyer, [emeyer4@ucmerced.edu](mailto:emeyer4@ucmerced.edu), (209) 205-8102 This is a partnership with the UC Merced Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program. The Pop-Up People’s Pantry takes place every Saturday from 1-2:30 pm at the People’s Garden. It started through community demand when COVID began to increase food insecurity and has not stopped since. Over 2,000 people have participated so far (a few dozen each weekend). Volunteers and a small staff gather food donated from the Food Bank, local grocers and food businesses, the Farmer’s Market, the flea markets, local farms, and home gardens. This food is arranged along tables with physical distancing, gloves, and masks and people take what they need through a line. Periodic events and non-food donations (e.g., toys, clothing) engage the community and youth.



\* People’s Fridge, <https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesFridge/>, September 2020 – current, over \$60,000 raised to date. This project is funded by a Go Fund Me campaign, Dignity Health Merced Community Grants, grassroots-fundraising, ongoing weekly donations, and in-kind

support. This is a partnership with the UC Merced Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program. Contact Steve Roussos, sroussos5@gmail.com, 209-489-9913. Community members from the Pop-Up People's Pantry asked for more ways to access fresh produce. A "free fridge" was suggested, and our team made the idea a reality. UC Merced students built and painted the fridge shed. Karen McCombs, a local artist, helps to custom paint each People's Fridge to match its community location. Dozens of volunteers and a small staff from the pantry help to stock, clean, and maintain the fridge daily. It is open 24-hours, every day. Every day, dozens of people use each People's Fridge. This includes people of all ages, including youth going and returning from school. Our team works with Merced County Environmental Health to ensure compliance with food safety. Every day, people are donating food for the People's Fridge (we have a separate donation fridge for this). We are helping more people start their own People's Fridge. There is a Delhi People's Fridge, Winton LifeLine People's Fridge, and Loughborough People's Fridge. In May 2022, there will be a new Village of Hope People's Fridge (with the Rescue Mission), and an All Gods' Children People's Fridge. Our team is working with Mr. Christopher Jensen, the City of Merced Parks and Recreation Department Director, to determine how to best place People's Fridges in existing Community Centers and other public areas serving the public with food security needs.



Each of these projects have improved the quality of life in our city by engaging volunteers in meaningful projects to improve nutrition, reduce hunger, and strengthen relationships among neighbors, residents, and businesses. During COVID, our community has experienced an increase in the need for free, nutritious food and an increase in events and ways to connect socially and emotionally with others. Requests to volunteer and requests for help to replicate the People's Garden, Pop-Up Pantry, and Fridge have been increasing. CPA does great in volunteer management and gaining donations to help grow, but we need help.

\* City of Merced Community Funding 2021-2022, People's Promise, \$10,000, June 1, 2021 - July 30, 2022. Contact Steve Roussos, sroussos5@gmail.com, 209-489-9913. Our team was thrilled to have received support for People's Promise as a 2021-2022 Community Funding grantee. Our goals were to increase volunteerism for the People's Fridge, Garden, and Pantry, increase locations of People's Fridges and Gardens, and provide monthly events for community members (especially families and youth) related to the gardening, nutrition and community building. The support launched the new People's Fridge in Loughborough Apartments with

LifeLine and supported a new front-yard garden with vegetables and fruits on the corner of Buena Vista and Wathen Ave (across First Baptist Merced, Church of Hope, in partnership with a local member of the Merced Master Gardeners). Another People’s Fridge is being planned for the Merced Central Youth Center (with help from Christopher Jensen of Parks and Recreation) and in the Senior Center on 15<sup>th</sup> Street (in partnership with the Merced Sunrise Rotary). The new locations and growth have increased our volunteers and volunteer opportunities (with over 20 new volunteers assisting).

Free community events have occurred biweekly to monthly depending on the weather and COVID concerns. Each event has reached between 10 to over 30 people. These have included BBQs and potlucks, holiday events at the garden (e.g., Halloween and Thanksgiving) including children’s activities, and promotion of literacy with our “Little Library” and a small book campaign. One of the more successful events has been the Your Rock appreciation. Twice each month, People’s Promise volunteers celebrate community helpers by inviting the residents to paint rocks as a “thank you.” Beautiful painted rocks are given as gifts, placed in the garden, or taken home as token of appreciation. Among the helpers celebrated to so far are bus drivers, fire and police teams, teachers, health workers, and food and pantry staff and volunteers.



The Community Funding for People's Promise has strongly established the People's Garden and its partner locations as safe, fun places to meet other residents and community leaders, to be part of the community, and to give back through volunteering with your neighbors. Our team was honored with the recent recognition for City of Merced, Volunteer of the Year for District 2 through our lead partner Erin Meyer. We hope to continue to live up to the expectation of this honor in service to our community.

We are requesting \$25,000 for 1-year to continue to grow the People's Promise. The People's Promise will coordinate and formally expand the current community activities at 18th street (i.e., People's Garden, Pop-Up People's Pantry, and People's Fridge) and replicate these in at least two new location in the City of Merced (at least one Community Center, at least one Senior Center, at least one new school location, and at least one new community organization serving families with food insecurity). The Community Funds will complement existing funds to support part of a volunteer coordinator and supplies for events and activities. As with our prior initiatives, the People's Promise will use the 1-year of Community Funding from the City of Merced to leverage and multiply new funds and support that grow volunteerism for health nutrition throughout the city. More details about these activities and budget description follow in our brief proposal.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manuel Alvarado". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "A".

Manuel J. Alvarado, CEO

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

Applicant: United Way of Merced County,  
Fiscal sponsor for the Community Partnership Alliance to implement the program

Project Name: People's Promise

### **Individual Staff Experiences**

***Stergios (Steve) Roussos, PhD, MPH*** will serve as the Program Director. Dr. Roussos is an original co-founder of the Community Partnership Alliance (CPA) since 2002 and has co-lead all the projects leading up to this proposal. He has 25-plus years of experience (19 in Merced) in collaborative advocacy initiatives as a participatory action researcher and as a social justice organizer. He will be responsible for overall project management, administration, and reporting. He works daily with all staff and volunteers of CPA to ensure success of the People's Garden, the People's Fridge, and the Pop-Up People's Pantry. Dr. Roussos was also the Program Director for the 2021-2022 City of Merced Community Funding for the People's Promise.

***Ortensia Vasquez*** will serve as the bilingual (Spanish) Program Coordinator. Mrs. Vasquez has been an integral part of the People's Garden, Fridge, and Pantry since April 2020. She is the heart and spirit of these initiatives for our community. Mrs. Vasquez has over 35 years of experience in community-based programs serving youth and families working to overcome barriers of poverty, violence, and marginalization. Her specialties include working with women and girls to improve behavioral health and empower positive life choices. Mrs. Vasquez will lead all daily operations of this project by coordinating staff and volunteers. This includes project planning and implementation, marketing and outreach, and community building and recognition.

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

**Project start-end dates:** July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023

**Goal:** Grow community-connectedness, trust and community service through events and volunteer opportunities to grow and share nutritious, free food for all, but especially for our community's children.

The overall goal of Project Promise is to grow volunteerism and community service among local residents for the purpose of improving food security for many (especially, young, developing children) who go hungry every day. Many people in our community experience food insecurity but do not show it. There is a lot of stigma to showing you are hungry. Our programs and activities are open to all people and are done in such a family-oriented way that people share and take food without fear of being seen in a poor way. We celebrate growing and sharing food – and make it fun too. City residents are helping grow and organize fresh produce, reduce hunger by improving food access, beautify the community with front yard gardens, and grow relationships with their neighbors and businesses. While not a direct goal, volunteers and neighbors have told

us that these public projects have made the 18<sup>th</sup> Street area around the garden feel safer and the neighbors more connected and prouder of their neighborhood. We are doing our best to manage the growth, support from the Community Funding will complement our existing resources to do this in a more organized and effective manner. We will grow our success at the location at 18<sup>th</sup> Street and at least at two other locations in the City of Merced (prioritizing the three existing City-funded community centers).

Deliverable 1. (Timeline: July 1, 2022 – onwards.) Provide outdoor events (one to four per month, with compliance for pandemic physical distancing, masking, and protective measures) at the 18<sup>th</sup> Street People’s Garden to increase home and community gardening of nutritious foods (e.g., gardening classes, pottery and stone painting for gardens, non-perishable food demos). An estimated 20 to 40 people will participate each month, reaching over 400 people during the year. These participation rates will increase with the addition of new garden, pantry, and fridge locations as described below.

Deliverable 2. (Timeline: July 1, 2022 – onwards.) Grow and manage the volunteer “People’s Promise Team” to help with events at the current People’s Garden and new locations that start throughout the year. An estimated 25 new volunteers will be engaged at least once each month during the year. Volunteers will include people of all ages with a strong base of students from our city’s high schools, Merced College, and UC Merced. At least 25% of our current volunteers are older adults and people who are retired. This all makes for a generationally rich volunteer team.

Deliverable 3. (Timeline July 1, 2022 – onwards.) Begin at least two new People’s Fridge locations and at least one new People’s Garden location. Priority will be given to expand to the south side of Merced with a focus on youth- and family-serving locations in partnership with Parks and Recreation. All People’s Fridge locations are selected based on their direct, easy, safe access for neighborhoods with documented food insecurity and who may not have a grocery store nearby. Deliverable 3 activities include volunteer coordination to support garden maintenance and daily cleaning and food delivery and stocking of the People’s Fridge locations.

<b><u>Program Budget: July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023</u></b>			
	<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>Requested for Community Funding</b>	<b>Other Committed Funding</b>
<b><u>PERSONNEL</u></b>			
<b>Salaries/Wages</b>			
Project Director (8% FTE)	\$6,240	\$2,500	\$3,740
Project Coordinator (30% FTE)	\$18,720	\$11,232	\$7,488
Total Salaries/Wages:	\$24,960	\$13,732	\$11,228
<b><u>Fringe Benefits</u></b>			
35%	\$8,736	\$4,806	\$3,930
Total Benefits:	\$8,736	\$4,806	\$3,930
Total Personnel Expenses:	\$33,696	\$18,538	\$15,158
<b><u>OPERATING EXPENSES</u></b>			
Rent/Space Justification: Estimated \$1,500 per month	\$18,000	\$0	\$18,000
Utilities Justification: water, electricity and garbage adjusted for project to \$110 per month on average	\$1,320	\$0	\$1,320
Office Expenses Justification: \$100 per month for printing, \$50 per month for office supplies	\$1,800	\$360	\$1,440
Local travel for project: 250 miles per month at \$0.56 per mile	\$1,680	\$0	\$1,680
Communications Justification: 1 project phone \$100 per month	\$1,200	\$0	\$1,200
Outreach materials: social media, flyers, posters at \$120 per month	\$1,440	\$248	\$1,192
Materials and supplies to implement events (e.g., paints, gardening supplies, cleaning and maintenance items for fridge, garden, and pantry events, refreshments for event volunteers and participants). At least 30 events serving 15 people on average, at \$10 per person.	\$4,500	\$4,000	\$500
TOTAL Operating Expenses:	\$29,940	\$4,608	\$25,332
TOTAL Program Expenses:	\$63,636	\$23,146	\$40,490
Other Expenses: indirect costs of 15% of total, only charged 10% of total personnel expenses	\$14,982	\$1,854	\$12,174
TOTAL Other Expenses:	\$9,545	\$1,854	\$7,692
<b>TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES:</b>	<b>\$73,181</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$48,181</b>

## References

Ileisha Sanders, MPH, Public Health Program Coordinator,  
[Ileisha.Sanders@countyofmerced.com](mailto:Ileisha.Sanders@countyofmerced.com), (209) 381-1104  
Merced County Department of Public Health (MCDPH), 260 E. 15th St. Merced, CA  
95341. MCDPH has been a client and funder for the community gardening work since 2016  
and partners in current projects for gardening and food access (including the current  
planning for a new Food Policy Council).

Cori Lambert, Grant Program Specialist, [clambert@ccah-alliance.org](mailto:clambert@ccah-alliance.org), 831-430-2518  
Central California Alliance for Health, (CCAH, Merced County's Medi-Cal insurer),  
[grants@ccah-alliance.org](mailto:grants@ccah-alliance.org), (831) 430-5784, 1600 Green Hills Road, Ste. 101, Scotts  
Valley, CA 95066; 530 West 16th Street, Ste. B, Merced, CA 95340-4710. Mrs. Lambert  
was our program contact for Project Grow funded by CCAH Grow since February 2018.

Erin Meyer, MS, Sustainable Food Programs Coordinator, [emeyer4@ucmerced.edu](mailto:emeyer4@ucmerced.edu),  
(209) 205-8102  
University of California, Merced, Office of Leadership, Service and Career, Office of  
Sustainability, 5200 Lake Road, Merced, CA 95343. Mrs. Meyer is a both a client and a  
partner from UC Merced for most of the projects described in this proposal. This includes the  
Pop-Up People's Pantry since April 2020 and the People's Fridge since September 2020.