



## PARTNER ORGANIZATION LETTER

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority  
33 Las Colinas Lane  
San Jose, CA 95119  
June 5, 2020

Dear Ms. Dreger,

I am delighted to write this letter offering my strong support of Sacred Heart Community Service's proposal for the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority's Urban Grant. The grant would benefit Sacred Heart's La Mesa Verde program, which has trained many residents on sustainable food growing practices in San Jose.

La Mesa Verde's program model, based on the principles of agroecology, connects individuals with organic gardening education, promotes cultural diversity and values, and fosters active life in the community. Furthermore, their model invites individuals to drive the program design and movement-building efforts. Through this novel approach, they have created a powerful network of allies, volunteers, and community leaders who take action for greater social change. I have attended multiple events organized by La Mesa Verde and I have been very impressed with their attention to racial and ethnic diversity, empowerment based model, and the active participation of residents or members in a peer to peer network of sharing best practices as well as their role in helping to set goals and policy for the organization.

For the last three years, I asked La Mesa Verde (LMV) to partner with the capstone class that I teach to graduating seniors in Environmental Studies and Sciences. Jaqueline Rivera and the LMV team has served as an outstanding community mentor for three teams of students. These projects ranged from working with the residents of Markham Plaza to advance the process of designing a community garden for residents to developing tools to assess the sense of belonging. Students learning with Jacky and the LMV team have produced some of the best work in highly competitive classes that regularly includes several students winning national awards (e.g., Rhodes, Fulbrights, etc), but perhaps more importantly, they have also learned about the dedication, humility, and cross cultural skills needed to do community organizing and advance environmental justice. These teams go beyond course requirements, translate their work into Spanish, and are more likely to commit their careers to service that advances access to green spaces and environmental justice.

I encourage you to look favorably on Sacred Heart's grant proposal. I believe that Sacred Heart will help Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority achieve its goal of enhancing access to healthy food, through urban farms and gardens, and connecting a diverse community to green space.

Sincerely,

Christopher M. Bacon, PhD  
Associate Professor of Environmental Studies

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