



Community Initiatives for Collective Impact (Ci4Ci)

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May 24, 2021

RE: AASHE Innovation Credit

Dear AASHE Committee,

I am writing this letter to affirm the leadership of the University of California, Merced (UC Merced) as a partner in the People's Garden in the City of Merced. The People's Garden is a community-based initiative to increase front-yard public gardens as one means of urban food sovereignty. Local food sovereignty is one strategy to address climate change through social and environmental justice. Located in downtown Merced, the People's Garden serves as a model, training facility, and resource (e.g., materials, tools) for community gardening. All produce is shared freely. Fresh produce was shared with those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The People's Garden began through a community-academic partnership between Community Initiatives for Collective Impact (Ci4Ci), the United Way of Merced County, and UC Merced. It was launched in 2019 as one of seven projects selected by the Merced County Participatory Budgeting Process (a.k.a., the People's Budget). UC Merced alumni, graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff helped design, fund, and build the garden, and assist with its ongoing operation. Projects and activities at the garden serve to demonstrate the value of community-academic partnership. For example, the garden's watering system resulted from a review and implementation of research on best practices in water conservation by UC students coupled with local landscapers to implement these best practices (e.g., weather- and temperature-sensitive automated watering). The intentional inclusion of both academic and community members in the garden's work strengthens the relationship between the young public research university and its predominantly lower-income, marginalized region.

The People's Garden complies with the criteria within the innovation credit by providing an innovative way to improve food sovereignty in urban settings. Program highlights include:

1. People's Garden is an innovative program within California and the Central Valley.
2. People's Garden is an ongoing program.
3. People's Garden was implemented and officially launched June 28, 2019 in Merced County.
4. People's Garden as a model for community-academic community gardening has not been widely adopted, and as such, is innovative.

More information may also be found at <https://www.facebook.com/MercedPeoplesGarden>. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with UC Merced to serve our community.

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Director