

Application to Serve on the Oversight Committee: City Heights Wellness Center

1. What is your organization's history working in City Heights?

As a result of interactive resident forums and key informant interviews, **the City Heights Wellness Center (Center)** was established in 2002 to leverage and strengthen community strategies and approaches to address a broad array of community health priorities, including nutrition, access to health promotion and prevention services and community engagement. Since its inception, the City Heights Wellness Center has been working with residents to improve their lifestyle behaviors and self-sufficiency skills. The Center is a unique project as there is no other health facility that was planned by multiple organizations for the promotion of health and nutrition in central San Diego. The Center accomplishes its' work by providing direct services, linking with other agencies to co-locate services at the Center, working in tandem with collaborative groups, health providers and other community based organizations to offer a variety of activities including health promotion and educational sessions, health screenings, entitlement eligibility and application assistance, community forums and speaker events, to name a few

2. Does your organization have an established base of residents with whom it works? Please explain.

The City Heights Wellness Center has become a trusted Institution among community residents, particularly among the Latino and East African members. Last year, community residents came to the Center for nearly 20,000 visits to participate in a host of educational and social support activities (nutrition, safety and health education, exercise and dance sessions and community meetings) in a variety of languages. The Center's Teaching Kitchen has become a community "hub" where residents come together with food and express their lives, needs and concerns in a safe and trusted environment. In addition, the Center has built a strong foundation of service programs and partnerships that residents have come to depend on as follows:

- Scripps Mercy WIC program, providing nutritional food vouchers and dietary counseling services to low-income pregnant and parenting women and their children, ages 0 – 5 years;
- Diabetes prevention and disease management services through Project Dulce;
- Mental health counseling services offered through Children's Hospital;
- Health insurance eligibility counseling and application assistance in conjunction with La Maestra Community Health Centers
- A variety of physical fitness activities for children and adults, at no/low cost for community residents. We are currently offering:
 - Parents on the Go (POGO), an exercise program whose main goal is to increase parent involvement in physical activity and making it fun.

3. What role does your organization envision fulfilling during the 9-month planning process? What expertise and resources will your organization offer and on which outcome area(s) will you focus?

The City Heights Wellness Center is committed to the CA Endowment's vision of "Building Healthy Communities" in their 10-year strategic plan. The staff has been involved and active in the CA Endowment's decision to choose City Heights as one of the 14 cities to be funded. The Center's location and trust in the community would make it the ideal location for meetings and activities over the 9 month planning process. The Center's management team has the health and

prevention program development expertise to develop and implement programs and has made the commitment towards advocacy work. Through a recently funded CA Endowment grant, Center staff along with SDSUF and Bill Oswald from Springfield College will work with the East African community to identify their community's health priorities related to health eating /nutrition, provide a host of training activities to develop leadership and advocacy skills as well as an advocacy agenda to pursue in the upcoming years.

The California Endowment has identified 10 outcomes it hopes to achieve for the City Heights community over the next 10 years. Some of the City Heights Wellness Center achievements that would position the Center to contribute to the overall goal are as follows:

- **#3- Health and family-focused human services shift resources towards prevention.** The Center's primary goal has been chronic disease prevention and improving healthy lifestyle behaviors. Center programs include Healthy Lifestyle Nutrition/Cooking classes; Breastfeeding/Nutrition Support Group; Diabetic Education classes; Hypertension Prevention; as well as offering community interactive discussion nights "Ask a Health Professional". The Center is also provides monthly Integrative Health Nights in collaboration with the Alternative Healing Network; the program offers massage, acupuncture and yoga.
- **# 6- Communities support health youth development.** Center programs and efforts in this area have included the collaborative to develop the infrastructure for School/Community garden at Rosa Parks Elementary School; implementation of Healthy Youth, Health Futures, Cooking classes for Somali Teens (girls)
- **#7- Neighborhood and school environments support improved health and healthy behaviors.** The Center has been a partner with local schools in improving health and healthy lifestyles The Center has also been actively working with school food service to include culturally appropriate food choices on the menu such as Halal foods for our Muslim students.

4. How is your organization representative of the diverse communities of people who live in City Heights?

The City Heights Wellness Center has established strong alliances and has become a central meeting place for numerous community-based organizations—such as: Mid-City Community Advocacy Network (Mid City CAN) and their momentum teams (Latinos y Latinas en Accion and the Food Justice Momentum Team [FJMT). Other collaborative partners include the International Rescue Community (IRC), the Hunger Coalition, San Diego Nutrition Network, San Diego County Obesity Initiative, San Diego Community Development Corporation, City Heights Parks and Recreation Department, the University of California Cooperative Nutrition Extension Program, and the San Diego Children's Safe Kids Coalition, and several public schools. Also through The California Endowment-funded Hooyo Health Program, the Center has developed strong alliances with agencies serving the East African/Somali community, such as Horn of Africa, Catholic Charities, Central Region HHSA, Somali Bantu Community of San Diego, Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS), schools and Law Enforcement agencies. In addition, Center staff have recently become actively involved in sustainable community change projects and activities. The Center Manager was appointed to the Board of the City Heights Business Association, chairs the Food Justice Momentum team, and served on the organizing committee of City Heights Community Development Council's Walk-to-School Day. City Heights Wellness Center staff serves on the advisory groups of Latinos y Latinas en Accion, Mid-City Coordinating Council, and the East African Advisory Group.