

Application to Serve on the Oversight Committee

Organization: La Maestra Community Health Centers

Representative: Zara Marselian, CEO

Phone: 619-961-0818

Email: zaramarselian@lamaestra.org

La Maestra Community Health Centers is a 501c(3) not-for-profit health organization founded in City Heights in 1990, as an offshoot of its parent non-profit La Maestra Amnesty Center. The Amnesty Center, started in 1986, was an educational center which offered services to residents in City Heights to help them gain their permanent residency status and citizenship. These services included classes in ESL, Civics and US History, a child literacy program, vocational training, translation, and assistance to complete applications and prepare for the residency and citizenship exams and the interview with INS. Volunteers from the Center also went to homes to photograph and fingerprint disabled applicants and assist them with resident and citizenship applications.

As staff and volunteers worked closely with immigrants and particularly with refugees, it became clear that these new residents would need more resources and services if they were to successfully overcome the language and cultural barriers they were facing. It is from this early beginning that La Maestra Community Health Centers began in 1990 to provide new citizens with not only basic medical care, but also other services that would support their needs. When the clinic was formed, so was a new and expanded mission – *“to provide quality healthcare and education, improve the overall well-being of the family, bringing the underserved, ethnically diverse communities into the mainstream of our society, through a caring, effective, culturally and linguistically competent manner, respecting the dignity of all patients.”*

In addition to providing medical, dental and mental health care for thousands of City Heights residents, including men, women, children and seniors (we had over 80,000 visits in 2008), La Maestra provides many social services to help our community members become self-reliant. These services include job training and placement, financial literacy, a microcredit program to help women start and grow their own businesses, and help finding safe, affordable housing. We provide assistance with finding which programs patients are eligible for and help them with the application process. We have had a dispensary since 2000, stocked with medicines from programs for uninsured low-income patients, and we opened a culturally-competent pharmacy here at our City Heights clinic in 2008 to ensure that insured patients also receive the prescriptions they need and understand how to take the medication. Staff members collectively speak 20 languages and provide translation, transportation and case management services.

La Maestra helps out the families in our community through special programs like our weekly food pantry and our annual holiday food and toy drive. Each bag of food given at the food pantry contains nutritious food, information about healthy eating and healthy recipes. Every December, La Maestra gathers donations and distributes thousands of toys for children and gifts for low-income families in our communities.

La Maestra (Spanish for “the teacher”) believes that the basis for any social change and effective healthcare outcome is education, so we offer health education classes and information for children, adults and seniors in many languages, at our clinic and throughout the community at public housing and low-income housing sites, schools, community centers and health fairs. Our Nutrition program classes address prevention of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, and other weight-related health issues and teach about healthy eating and exercise. Our Diabetes program provides diabetic patients with tools to improve and better manage their chronic condition, learn to prevent cardiovascular disease and other related diseases, and access medications at little or no cost. La Maestra offers the

Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program, where pregnant women receive comprehensive services including prenatal care, health education, nutrition services, and psychosocial support.

In May of 2010, La Maestra will open our new green health facility in City Heights, after more than six years of planning and fundraising for the construction. We will be making history by becoming one of the first USGBC LEED © Gold-certified community clinics in the country, showing that it is possible for small, non-profit health clinics to be at the forefront of sustainable design, and raising awareness that healthier healthcare facilities should be an integral part of patients' healthcare and a community's commitment to the environment. La Maestra's new health center is being constructed with sustainable, recycled and locally sourced building materials and techniques that will also save energy. We will have an "environmental literacy" program to educate the community about the concepts, materials and methods utilized in the construction of this green building and about how they can make their own homes and community healthier by being environmentally conscious.

La Maestra is currently the largest employer in City Heights. Most of the employees are from the culturally diverse populations we serve. Immigrants or refugees themselves, they have first-hand knowledge of the issues that can affect medical, dental, and mental health care. We have Medically Trained Cultural Liaisons who live in Section 8 housing in City Heights and provide valuable, ongoing input from the Latino, Somali, Sudanese, Vietnamese, Laotian and Burmese residents, in addition to being trained medical assistants and providing translation on a daily basis. The members of our Board of Directors also represent the populations served and live or work in our service area. It is estimated that our patient visits will double during the next three years and triple at the end of seven years in the new building. The number of new employees will also increase proportionately.

Zara Marselian, CEO and co-founder of both La Maestra Amnesty Center and La Maestra Community Health Center, grew up in San Diego and has lived and worked in City Heights since 1979. First, she worked as a teacher, developing curriculum and programs. The building that holds our reception and waiting room (La Maestra is located in 14 converted houses that span one block of Fairmount Avenue) was once her home. She started the clinic in her living room by asking physicians to volunteer their time to give check-ups to City Heights residents (most of them students at the Amnesty Center) who couldn't otherwise access medical care. Ms. Marselian has over 20 years of experience in healthcare planning and administration, grantwriting and community development that will be extremely valuable in the planning process. She has worked tirelessly, with the collaboration of La Maestra staff and health organizations, to raise the funds to start the clinic and continue expanding services in response to the community's needs. La Maestra has been fortunate to receive various grants from The California Endowment, funding which has been utilized with very successful outcomes

For almost 25 years, La Maestra has recognized the needs of City Heights residents and responded by developing creative solutions, collaborative efforts, and extensive networks across many strata: medical, oral and mental healthcare, education and literacy, community and economic development, and enabling services including eligibility assistance, translation, transportation, case management and immigration application assistance. We look forward to expanding our programs and services to ensure that each resident in our growing community is safe, healthy, educated and self-sufficient.

La Maestra will bring over 20 years of expertise, our patient/client base of 70,000 in City Heights, our networks and collaborative partners across many fields of society, and limitless energy to devote to this great opportunity presented by The California Endowment to revitalize the City Heights/Mid-City area.