

Dear JJCC,

My name is Joel Garcia, Co-Founder of Meztli Projects a cohort member of Ready 2 Rise, the Youth Development initiative, a partnership between the California Community Foundation, Liberty Hill, and the Probation Department.

I was born and raised in East Los Angeles and have been an artist and arts administrator with 20+ experience serving my community, I also spent 8 years leading the acclaimed arts organization Self Help Graphics & Art which arose out of the Chicano Movement more specifically the ensuing efforts coming out the Chicano Moratorium.

In all that time, I have not been able to source funding that would authentically and holistically allow our efforts to support our Youth in the way that Ready 2 Rise has provided support for us to do just that. I have served on local, statewide and national grant review panels and efforts and I am well aware of the trends and efforts that exist to provide truly equitable funding to small-grassroots organizations that are by and for us. Ready 2 Rise has provided that to our Youth in East Los Angeles. Because of Covid-19 some of our youth who we serve have been pushed out into other areas making our work that much more critical.

Our work, which is rooted in shared-leadership models and is process-based meaning that we co-design programs along those we serve, is a model that is rare and because of the current moment for racial justice and one in which Covid-19 has affirmed all the deficiencies we have known existed in underserved communities, is one that should be replicated in other communities. This model has allowed us to be granted an innovative 3-year grant by the California Arts Council (to be announced on Sept 10, 20) to implement this methodology (arts + wellness) here in East LA specifically focusing on Native/Indigenous Youth.

I urge the JJCC to continue funding the Ready 2 Rise initiative and release the currently approved funding so that the 49 organizations that are part of Ready 2 Rise can continue doing this important work in Los Angeles County beyond June 2021.

Thank you,

Joel Garcia
Meztli Projects
www.meztliprojects.org