

## Our Commitment to Inclusion Eliminating Financial Barriers to Community Gardens of Tucson Board Service

In June 2020, the CGT Board of Directors began discussing actions that the organization could take in order to more proactively fight systemic racism. As result, we incorporated CGT's newly adopted position on racism and commitment to change in our Vision, Mission and Values. We also revised the language and requirements in our gardener agreements, garden rules, plot fee assistance program, and work exchange program. Our goal was to become a much more diverse, inclusive organization that was open and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or income level. Meeting this goal also involved expanding our recruitment efforts into low-income and under-represented neighborhoods, and soliciting ideas and feedback from our gardeners, staff, Site Coordinators, and partner organizations. Our gardens began to fill with gardeners from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and skill sets, as the gardens received the support needed from the part-time contract staff we had hired earlier in the year.

But the work had just begun. In March 2021, with two Directors retiring from the Board, we began recruiting for their replacements, consistent with CGT's Bylaws and Board policies that had been created years earlier. Only through this process, when asked by a prospective Director why CGT required a financial commitment to the organization, did we realize that our "give or get" policy was impeding our aspirations to build a Board truly reflective of the communities we serve. It became readily apparent, then, that while our goal was to diversify the Board, we had in fact failed to review or revise any relevant documents to ensure that they supported achieving this goal. Only when we evaluated our Bylaws and policies through the "diversity lens" did the limitations presented by the language and requirements in these documents become evident. Of particular note was the longstanding tradition that every Director make a meaningful financial contribution to the organization so that the Board is fully enrolled with 100 percent giving. In view of the barriers that this requirement created to achieving a more inclusive Board, one that truly reflects the communities we serve and more consistent with contemporary nonprofit governance, in April 2021 we eliminated the "give or get" language in both our Bylaws and policies.

In retrospect, it is now clear that our previous policies on board giving were at odds with our commitment to be a more diverse, inclusive and welcoming organization. It was uplifting for us to recognize that these policies had been a structural barrier to diversity and that we had the will and the power to remove them. In taking this important step forward and challenging the *status quo*, we now hope to welcome new Directors to our Board who otherwise would not have been able to join our work to, "build community gardens where Tucsonans grow food, work and learn together, and nurture well-being in our communities."