



Department of Family and Community Medicine

Alan K. David, M.D.
Professor and Chairman

February 15, 2019

Dear President Raymond and President's Community Engagement Award Committee

Without reservation, I would like to submit a letter of support for Al Castro for the President's Award for Community Engagement from the Medical College of Wisconsin. Though there are many deserving candidates, Mr. Castro epitomizes partnership, community engagement and supports research and medical student education here at MCW. Many academic partners have worked with Al Castro and the United Community Center for nearly 20 years in a variety of areas including physical activity, health education, elder care, making research more accessible and in the identification of eye disease within the Latinx community.

Al continues to be an outstanding community partner and more importantly, continues to both advocate for and teach about Latinx health issues. I would like to provide a couple of examples of how important a partner he is and what he means to both his community and to the Medical College of Wisconsin. These examples will demonstrate the strength of this candidate for this award.

His primary role at the United Community Center is the Director of Research. In this role, he establishes community academic partnerships for research that involves members of his agency, the community and academic institutions across Wisconsin. Most recently, I worked with Al on the "Opening Doors" project – a project designed to reduce the barriers to research for both community and academic partners. The project sponsored by Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program was designed to develop an alternative to the traditional CITI training that might not work as well for community partners as it does for academic institutions.

Al was involved with all aspects of the partnership – from the project design, to writing of the proposal and so on through each stage. He collected data and supported analysis of that data. It was the interpretation and program design that demonstrated his fullest set of resources to the project. We had recently interviewed some colleagues from the United Community Center and Al was able to speak into the nuances of Latinx culture and what it could mean for our project. This interpretation and translation could only come from someone skilled at navigating the culture and explaining it to those not from the community. His ability to maneuver from the community context to the academic institution looks easy and seamless. It is anything but easy and he has both the training, experience and ability to see both sides to make it work for all the partners.

We will attract the best by our excellence

He participates fully in all our collaborations and looks for ways to further research with the community in partnership. When asked to speak to medical students, undergraduate students or even faculty members, he brings his community and cultural understanding to the conversation. It is always with him and that provides him with a grounding that is needed to work in both community and academic environments. Questions and even mis-steps are treated with kindness yet are used as opportunities to teach. He wants his partners "to be successful" and to do so, non Latinx partners will make mistakes. Under Al's guiding way along with our own cultural humility, projects are completed and understanding increases.

Developing partnerships takes time, effort and investment by those involved. You can certainly participate in a superficial partnership that is effective. However, when you have a long-standing and deep-rooted partnership with both an individual and the agency and community they believe in, we go much deeper. The issues that face our community are both broad and deep and solutions will need to come from academic health centers like MCW and community-based organizations like the United Community Center and from people like Al Castro. I hope this provides a glimpse of this valuable community partner and will give his application for this award strong consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David A. Nelson, PhD, MS".

David A. Nelson, PhD, MS

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