



# A Year in Review

## 2021 Annual Report



# Mission & Vision

Our mission is to cultivate healthy youth through growing gardens in low-income, diverse communities.

Our vision is that all youth are able to benefit from the joy and healing of nature-based outdoor education, and develop the tools, confidence, and resources to navigate and challenge structural injustices.



# Land Acknowledgement

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We acknowledge that the  
gardens we steward and  
the schools at which we  
teach sit on the unceded  
ancestral homeland of the  
Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh)  
Ohlone peoples, who are  
the original inhabitants of  
the San Francisco  
Peninsula. We pay our  
respects to the human and  
non-human elders, past  
and present.

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Thank You!



# Letter from CommunityGrows

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**“All plants need to grow is sun, soil, water and love”, a student remarked to one of our educators.**

Looking back at 2021, it is clear that it has continued to not only be a time of transitions and challenges, but of incredibly rewarding successes. Like many of you, we recognize the importance of maintaining a sense of community even when we can't meet in person as often as we previously did.

Just as the student remarked that only a few key ingredients are needed for plants to flourish, we also recognize the importance of simple yet strong ingredients for our communities to flourish, such as community building, resilience, etc.

As we grew more knowledgeable about how to navigate life during a pandemic, we shifted our programming and transformed what we had to. This was done in order to accommodate for virtual learning while keeping students connected to the natural world. We were able to do this by continuing to provide garden kits as schools remained remote in the Spring and distributing them to our schools and partners such as the Beacon-Buchanan YMCA, the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, Mission Graduates for Flynn, Up on Top, and more local organizations.

Most recently, as of late 2021, we have been a part of in person activities, such as the Halloween and Winter Events at the AAACC. It had been a while since we were able to come together in events like these during the past months and seeing this small bit of normalcy return has been amazing to be a part of, reigniting our beautiful sense of community!

We recognize that the sense of community and green spaces the gardens provide is vital for our students, especially when the world around them continues to change in uncertain ways.

"I miss meditating in the garden together!"

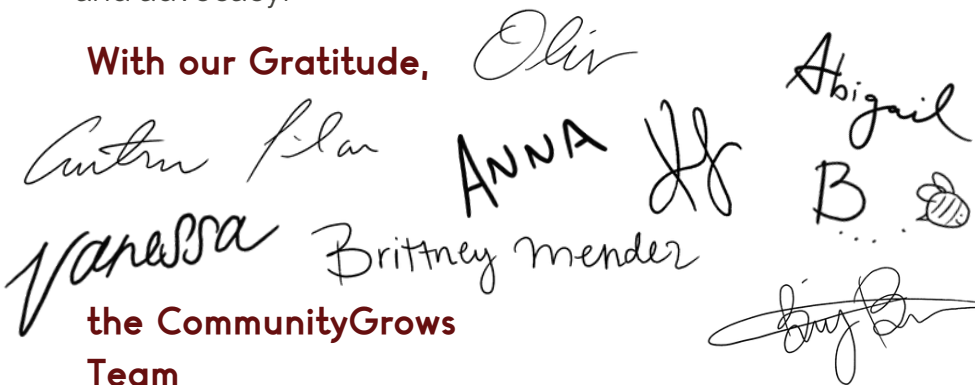
"I miss salad day!"

While it was great seeing our students, even if it was remotely, we loved watching the children return to the gardens, witnessing the joy on their faces as they enjoyed a salad made of the ingredients they helped grow in the school gardens. Watching kids harvest from the veggies in the school gardens and using them to make salads reminds us that there's nothing like hands-on learning; seeing something you've grown and cultivated turn into a delicious meal to enjoy in these pockets of green in the city.

In addition, to our garden classes, nine BEETs teens graduated from our 2020-2021 school year program, while six new teens have joined us for the 2021-2022 school year! We are incredibly proud of the BEETs and look forward to seeing them continue to thrive!

This past year has brought on a lot of uncertainty. As the world continues to adapt and evolve to a new normal, so do we. As we transition from distance learning to in-person classes, restructure our organizational and team structures, and begin to partner and host in-person events, we cannot emphasize just how grateful we are for your support, love, and advocacy!

**With our Gratitude,**


  
**the CommunityGrows**  
**Team**

# Our Programs





# Our Programs



## Seed to Mouth

Promoting healthy eating habits and enhance food sovereignty through hands-on cooking guidance and culturally relevant food education.

## Environmental Education

Connecting elementary-age students with the natural world through hands-on experiences in outdoor learning gardens.



## BEETs

(The Band of Environmentally Educated and Employable Teens)  
A internship and hands-on learning experience in which youth gain job skills through learning about environmental justice and gardening with a small group of peers.



# Our Programs

## Cooking with CommunityGrows



**CommunityGrows**  
Planting seeds, co-powering youth

## Program Highlights

### Booker T Recipe Book

During the shift from remote to hybrid classes, we were delighted to welcome the return of our Seed to Mouth cooking classes. Every week, educator Yaya would create healthy and fun recipes that the students could make themselves. Social distancing rules meant that Yaya was teaching from a different room, but was able to live stream the cooking process during which students could follow along in real time. As cooking classes came to an end, Yaya and fellow CG member Abigail worked to compile the recipes into a fun recipe book that students could take home.



### Garden Kits

During the first half of the year, we continued making and providing Garden Kits to our program partners. As a supplement to online lessons, CommunityGrows educators worked to create lesson plans and provide supplies for students to be able to follow the projects at home.

# Our Programs



## Program Highlights

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### Garden Kits (continued)

We created hundreds of garden kits to help students learn and grow at home and at Community Learning Hubs. Each kit had supplies and instructions (or an accompanying CG video) to complete a science/garden learning activity. Kit themes included activities like 'Mystery Seed Planting,' 'Habitat Build,' 'Terrarium Build,' 'Nature Brushes,' 'Planting Soil Experiment,' and more. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who helped plan, arrange and deliver these kits, and we are proud to say that they received positive feedback from partners and students alike!



# Our Programs

## Program Highlights

### CommunityGrows Coloring Book

As a supplement to our Garden Kits, CG member Abigail designed several coloring pages exclusively for CommunityGrows. While some were related to the Garden Kit lessons and others were more general in their theme, each design incorporated gardening, harvesting, and healthy eating. It has been so heartwarming to receive photos of the filled in coloring pages, showing us that these were a success with our students!



### Back to In-person Classes

In the latter half of the year, we were able to return to in person classes. Although there were some modifications to be done to ensure the safety of students and staff, we are happy to see students in person once again. As Cristina notes, teaching in person is "fulfilling... It's good to be there and show them, to see their reactions and the energy from the students... the smiles, the curiosity, the one on one connections..."





# Our Programs



“ all plants  
need to grow is  
sun, soil, water  
and love

-Elementary  
school student

“ I love  
the way  
dirt feels

-Elementary  
school student





# Meet the Team

## About our Restructure

As we have continued our organizational restructure, our intention has been to create a work environment where each member of our team has an equal voice in how we operate. We hope that this new structure will better reflect our values and vision for a just world.

As we reflect back on 2021, we asked our team, "What has been your favorite memory at CommunityGrows?"



### Anna Luberoft

Director of Programs (she/her)

[My favorite memory from 2021 at CommunityGrows has been] Our staff white elephant gift exchange, and getting to be back in the garden--in person--with students.

ANNA



### Vanessa Williams

Environmental Education Programs Manager (she/her)

[My favorite memory from 2021 at CommunityGrows has been] Collaborating with the other educators on the team to come up with innovative and fun ways to still connect with our students and partners while in a socially distance pandemic"

Vanessa

# Meet the Team



## Cristina Vila Ruiz

Bi-lingual Garden Educator & Operations Specialist  
(she/her)

My favorite 2021 memory in CG is making garden kits. It was a lot of coordination and materials needed. Still, it was so rewarding to work together, brainstorm ideas, and have amazing co-workers who have a lot of enthusiasm and skills. As we distributed them it was nice receive the positive feedback, pictures of plants growing, and excitement about what we would bring next.



## B Freas

BEETs Program Manager & Organizational Strategist  
(they/them)

Last year our BEETs Program took place virtually 95% of the time, which meant on those few occasions when it felt safe enough for us to see each other in person in the garden, I felt really excited. It was like getting to see old friends I'd never met. These were students I'd gotten to know for months online, but I didn't even know how tall they were! I didn't know what kind of shoes they wore, or how loud their laughs were, because we were often muted. Those spring days in the garden made it feel like the seeds of hope Vanessa and I had been planting were finally blooming - the connections and the joy was real! It didn't just live behind screens.



## Karen Lally

Director of Operations (she/her)

My favorite memories at CommunityGrows this year have been our check-in / check-out questions during meetings. I really appreciate how dedicated people are to sharing creative and thoughtful answers, and I feel like I've learned a lot about everyone! I always feel happy after a check-out question with the team.

# Meet the Team



## Abigail Henriquez

### Operations and Development Manager (she/her)

Some of my favorite memories from 2021 at CG have been when we have been able to meet/work in person. This has happened a couple of times: when we've had in-person meetings, met up to work together, or when helping out in the gardens and during salad days. Although seeing the cg team and students in person has been less than during pre-pandemic times, these moments have been filled with warm energy, helping invigorate the team and keep the energy alive.

*Abigail*



## Brittney Mendez

### Communications and Development Coordinator (she/her)

My favorite memory at CG so far has been when I went to sit in and observe a class of elementary school kids at the Koshland Garden. I was there to write about what the kids are learning in the garden for the CG blog and I could tell how much they really enjoyed exploring the gardens. They were learning in an interactive way and it made them more curious to ask questions about the plants and the bugs.

*Brittney mender*



## Brittney Barron

### Community Engagement Coordinator (she/her)

My favorite memory at CG has been the wreath making event with the kids and seniors at Ella Hill. Seeing them come out and having fun and just feeling all that holiday cheer and cross-generational mutual love was so beautiful! I also really loved our holiday party! I finally got to meet everyone all together in person, and I had so much fun.

*Brittney Barron*



# Americorps VISTA

The AmeriCorps VISTA program is a government funded way for nonprofits working to combat poverty to receive additional staff support. Written below is what our two current VISTAs, Brittney and Britt, as well as our former VISTA, Abigail had to say about their experiences at CommunityGrows



I joined the CG team in August 2021 and I have learned so much about the nonprofit world and specifically communications in a nonprofit setting. Having a limited budget has allowed me to think more creatively about how to use the limited resources I have to expand my skills. Thankfully, there are a lot of free resources available for folks in the nonprofit sector and that is essential to the growth of an organization. I've also been lucky enough to have the opportunity to visit our beautiful gardens and interact with the students who we are serving. As well as, attend in-person community events and meet so many amazing leaders who are making a difference.

—Britt Mendez



# Americorps VISTA



During my time as a VISTA with CommunityGrows, I gained so much experience working in the nonprofit sector. My year as a VISTA, which took place from August 2020-2021 allowed me to experience the resilience and adaptability of the team at CommunityGrows. COVID and social distancing measures were prevalent throughout the majority of my year as a VISTA, giving way to a unique situation, learning to build and sustain community partnerships, fundraising, and getting members of the community involved in CommunityGrows' mission in spite of the limitations of the pandemic. In spite of the circumstances surrounding the past year, I'm extremely grateful to have been a part of the organization as a VISTA and am excited to continue working with CommunityGrows as a part of the staff.

—Abigail Henriquez

# Americorps VISTA

I joined CG in October of 2021 as a VISTA, and it has been such an incredible learning experience. It has been so cool to see and learn about the ins and outs of nonprofit management and has inspired me to continue to pursue this kind of work. I love so much that I get to directly engage with communities, especially communities that I identify as a part of, and see the impact that the work of such nonprofit organizations has on them.

At CommunityGrows in particular, I get to see the positive impact that engaging with nature can have on kids from such an early age, as well as learning of social justice and environmentalism, both things that I believe should be introduced at a young age. Engaging with nature can be so healing and connect so many people. I am so happy to be a part of something so great.

—Brittney Barron





# Fundraising



# Fundraising

## Highlights

### Impact of your Contributions

Despite the obstacles that 2021 brought, you helped us get through it all. From supporting us through our Giving Tuesday Campaign, Tote Bag Fundraiser, BEETs Apparel Fundraiser, a \$5 donation or sharing a link with a friend, your contributions have made a huge impact.

One major impact of your donations has been increasing our staff salaries. As the cost of living in the Bay Area continues to rise, it is essential that we pay our staff a reasonable wage in order to recruit and retain a talented team. When we can support our staff financially, our staff can continue to make positive impact on the communities we serve, such as giving kids tools to use in the workforce, teaching them to navigate the world, and helping develop an awareness of the healing benefits of being outside with nature.

Additionally, through our programs, we are able to build communities and help create a generational impact. The kids that we interact with today are the leaders of tomorrow, leaders of communities that have been historically marginalized, and silenced.





# Fundraising

## Your Donations in Action

### Continued

We are also incredibly excited to share that in 2021, we were able to hire a new garden and nutrition educator, Oliv Brown! Not only are we thrilled for Oliv to join the CG family, but we are also very happy that her arrival means that we can bring back cooking classes for our students!

In addition to those accomplishments, CommunityGrows has been able to match San Francisco's minimum wage for new BEETs (\$16.32) and \$17.32 an hour for Leadership Crew members. The Leadership Crew, a multi-level leadership opportunity, encourages teens to return to the program and continue building their skills by offering more money, more responsibility, and additional learning opportunities.





# Fundraising

**I have never done anything like that before. It was great to see how thankful they were for our help**

-BEETs student about a workday experience



**Everyone is nice to each other and it's something I look forward to every single day**

-Student about the BEETS program



# Financials





# Financials

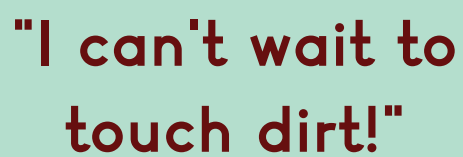
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As we continue to learn and adjust to the way CommunityGrows and our programs operate in this “new normal,” we remain deeply committed to collaborating with schools and communities in order to provide gardens and safe spaces for students to learn, be curious, and benefit from the joy and healing of nature-based outdoor education.

The financial realities of COVID-19 have reinforced the need to continue strengthening our financial stability in 2022 by **building our 6-month reserve, diversifying our funding streams, and continuing to create both short- and long-term financial strategies to support staff** so that youth are able to receive quality programming. In 2021, we were able to bring in more foundation-based funding, as well as unrestricted general operating funds, which have allowed us to meet some of our staff compensation goals (see more below). We want to continue this work into 2022, in addition to connecting with our individual donors and potentially restarting our corporate team building days (covid-19 allowing). We have built a strong culture with a talented and supportive staff here at CommunityGrows and we want to be able to maintain our positive culture with equitable compensation.





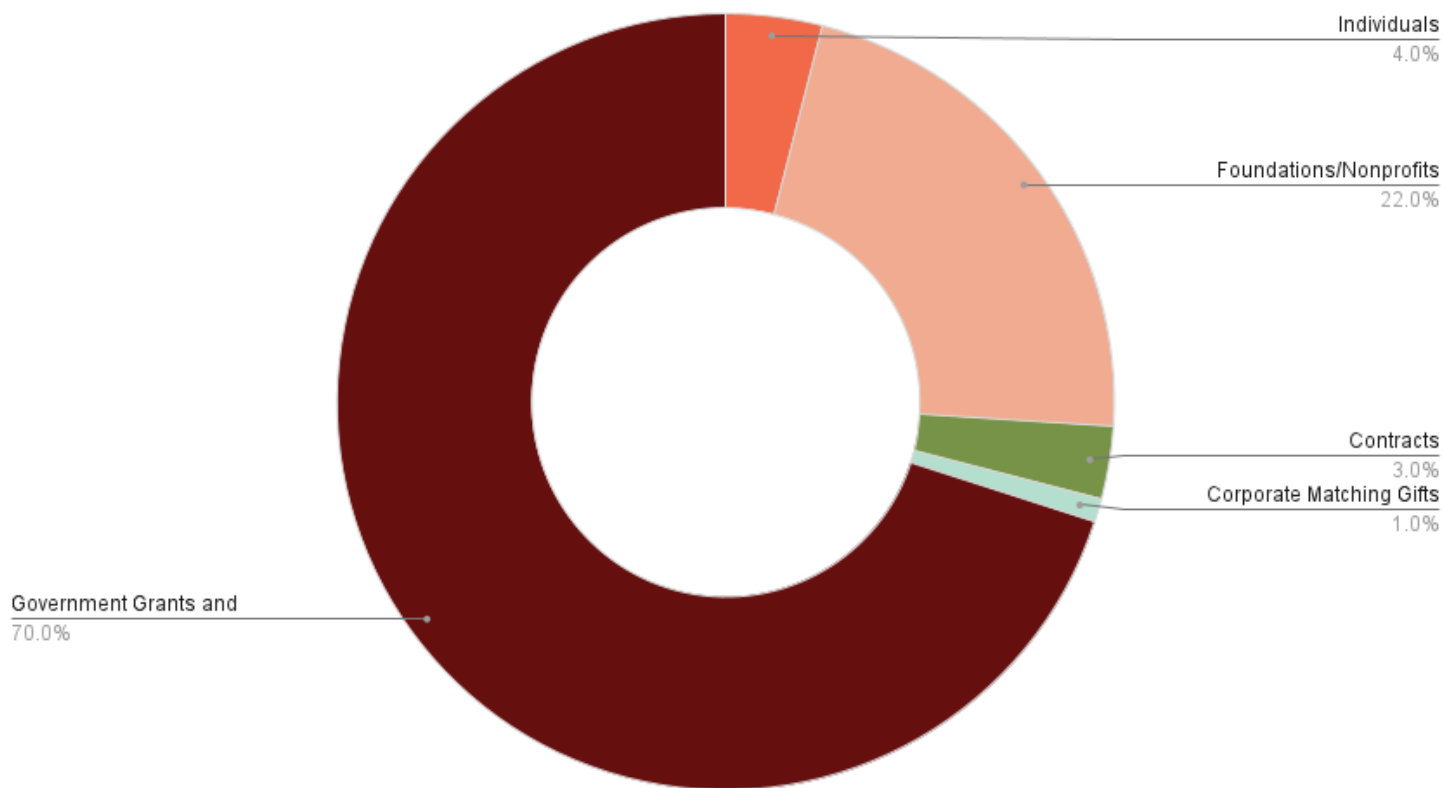


A group of children and an adult are working in a garden bed. One child is wearing a pink hoodie, another a pink shirt and patterned pants, and a boy is wearing a blue shirt and cap. They are surrounded by green plants and a white bucket.



# Financials

## Revenue for 2021

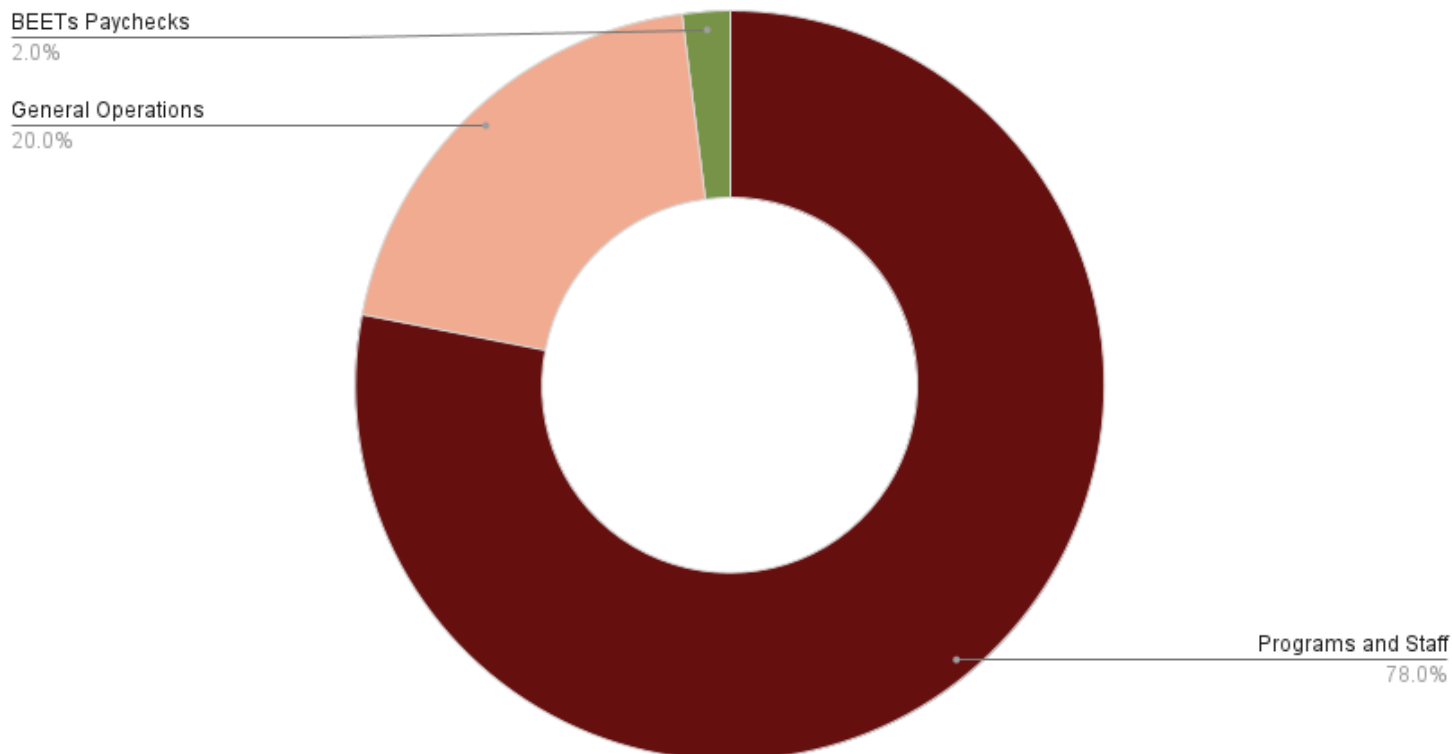


**Hiring new individuals to support the team and continuing to uplift and retain the current staff are major strategic goals.** In 2021, we were able to hire a part-time educator (Oliv), a part-time Operations and Development staff (Abigail), and give small incremental raises to our team. That being said, the Bay Area is an expensive place to live and it is challenging for us to hire and retain our team since we cannot offer competitive salaries (compared to SF rates). In addition, nonprofit staff are often expected to work far beyond their capacity, which affects their own health and wellness, leading to burnout and turnover that reduce our impact in the community. In addition to retaining staff and deepening our partnerships, we will need additional members to fill programmatic and administrative roles. This will allow for long-term sustainability and the growth of our programs. In 2022, we will focus on hiring, training, and supporting a diverse staff (including continuing to bring up staff salaries), and work together to maintain an inclusive and healthy team.



# Financials

## Expenses for 2021



Financials are a key part of our organizational and programmatic health, but sometimes it can be easy to forget that fundraising and grant-writing allow for this work to continue. We love to remember moments like these that happen as a result of advocacy from our supporters: During a class at Rosa Parks, one student said "I love the way dirt feels" and took home a ball of dirt in her pocket to hold. Anna, the garden educator, said she loves moments like these because it is so clear how much being back in the garden has been ground and healing for students after a difficult and disconnected year.



# Thank You!





# Thank You!

## Partners

Through the support  
and collaboration with  
our partners, we work  
together towards our  
collective  
vision of a strong and  
healthy community

African American Arts and Culture Complex  
Booker T. Washington Community Service  
Center Buchanan YMCA  
John Muir Elementary School  
Magic Zone  
Mo' MAGIC  
Rosa Parks Elementary School  
San Francisco Recreation & Parks  
Department Up On Top Village Project  
Western Addition Beacon Center  
Willie Mays Boys & Girls Club at Hunters Point  
Youth Art Exchange  
Ella Hill Hutch Community Center  
Leonard Flynn Elementary  
Malcolm X Academy Elementary School

## Advisory Board

**Mitali Avadhani**, AI/ML Analyst,  
Noodle.ai  
**Roxie Bartholomew**, Senior Manager,  
Bain & Company  
**Erin Claybaugh**, Home  
Economist/Homemaker with a  
background in sustainability programs  
management and nature interpretation

**Christina Mathis**, Corporate Vice  
President, CCS  
**Caitlin McLaughlin**, Manager, Clearway  
Energy Group  
**Jaromy Schmidt**, District Manager,  
Starbucks  
**Evan Zhang**, Associate, Norwest Venture  
Partners

# Thank You!

## Thank You to our Supporters

**We would not be able to  
do what we do without  
our supporters Thank  
you to every person who  
has engaged with our  
organization!**

Alex Brown	Erin Claybaugh
Alondra Flores	Erin Sumpmann
Alycia Ellington	Evan Zhang
Alyssa Seeley	Genevieve Dimmitt
Amy Berg	Griffin Schmitt
Audrey Van Zee	Heather Beserra
Barbara Early	Jeff Sun
Barbara Wenger	Jesús Guillén
Beth Jameson	Jonathon Schmidt
Brielle Mariucci	Judith Keenan
Carol Koffel	Karen Lally
Christina Mathis	Kelly Hunt
Cristina Vila Ruiz	Kevin McCoy
Deborah Walker	Leigh Ann Townsend
Desiree Vila Ruiz	Marsha Kaplan
	Mary Watson
	Maureen Morrison
	Melyssa Mendoza
	Mitch Cohen
	Naomi Landy
	Neha Subramanian
	Pam Olson-Lally
	Peter Coyote and Steanie Pleet
	Philip Lewis
	Rachel McMahan
	Randy and Shana Johnson Rabidoux
	Ronald Ayotte
	Ron Gerling



# Thank You!

## Thank You to our Supporters

Rosalind Reynolds

Sara Abdel

Sarah Lam

Sarianne Madsen

Scott Stern

Sophie Constantinou

Stacy Thompson

Steve Costa

Teela Crosthwaite Smith

