

## Project Proposal for the United Coordinated Outreach Network

Faith Rasmussen

### *About the Project*

This is a proposal for a mutual aid outreach network project in Tacoma. The Osheroff Grant is named after Abe Osheroff at 20, joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a group of U.S. volunteers who fought alongside the Spanish Republican forces to stave off the fascist Franco regime. He continued to advocate for civil rights throughout the remainder of his life.

[\[Link to Grant Information\]](#)

*Statement of purpose describing the project, qualifications to execute this proposal, and the project's timeline:*

The United Coordinated Outreach Network is a project that aims to coordinate and organize existing mutual aid outreach efforts in Tacoma, through community centered planning. The project is focused on directly serving the unhoused and documenting their experiences since the Tacoma City Council passed *Ordinance 28831* (ORD28831) in November of 2022, which establishes a “ten-block buffer prohibiting camping and the storage of personal belongings on public property around temporary shelters”. This project will begin on May 1, 2023, and will conclude on September 3, 2023.

Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948), yet the Tacoma City Council members who voted for the encampment ban are

directly violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for not only depriving the unhoused of safety but also criminalizing their “lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Throughout the project, the documentation of the experiences of the unhoused Tacoma community will be gathered to present to the Tacoma City Council. The findings will hold them accountable for their role in violating the human right of housing and the right to property. This documentation will share the stories of the unhoused people and recognize the harm exasperated by Ordinance 28831. The Tacoma City Council’s neglect of the unhoused is unnecessary, unproductive, and unrelenting in its cruelty.

My prior experience in mutual aid and direct action with my fellow protestors during the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020 allows me to champion this project with the knowledge that I gained while working alongside the unhoused in Seattle. We operated the mutual aid center from June of 2020 until the park was swept by Seattle Police Department on December 18, 2020. Local activists in Seattle came together and we helped the unhoused with their property, monitored the park, and stood by the unhoused when SPD had about 20 police cars circle the park with their lights and sirens, at 4 a.m. the day of the sweep. Later they and the Parks Department destroyed the mutual aid center we built.

Since moving to Tacoma, I’ve hosted a mutual aid outreach event with my peers and have begun working with the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness. I learned about the advocacy work in Tacoma that spans decades by attending meetings with representatives of the City of Tacoma’s departments and saw that the city’s promises are hollow words. Although, I still have hope that something can be done to support the unhoused in Tacoma by organizing the

existing mutual aid groups, doing direct outreach, and presenting the stories that Ordinance 28831 attempts to smother.

*Keeping in mind Abe's and Gunnel's commitment to accountability, how will your project bring about greater accountability for US institutions?*

The United Coordinated Outreach Network's final reflection stage will present the claims made by the Tacoma City Council members that rationalized their decision to vote for Ordinance 28831 and disprove the validity of their arguments through the testimonies of the unhoused. The Tacoma City Council passed ORD28831, despite the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (U.S.I.C.H.) advising against legal measures (such as ORD28831) that violate the right housing. U.S.I.C.H. proclaims that in the criminalization of activities that "are otherwise legal in the setting of a home: sleeping, sitting, eating, drinking", the housing crisis of a city are only increased (*Collaborate, Don't Criminalize*, n.d.). With the suggested tactics provided by U.S.I.C.H. and Dean Spade's *Mutual aid: Building solidarity during this crisis (and the next)*, this project will address the housing crisis in Tacoma, Washington through organized group collaboration. With the community being at the center of planning, the unhoused will be shown the respect, solidarity, and dignity they deserve as our neighbors. The final presentation of the stories and ramifications of Ordinance 28831 will be shared with the public and provide evidentiary support for legislative reform. Learning about the strengths in weaknesses in the actual implementation of the outreach network system will also help other cities replicate their outreach in an efficient and sustainable manner. Hopefully, this exposure of the moral and systemic failing of Tacoma City Council will motivate them to do better and remind them of the consequences that follow criminalizing the unhoused.

*Are you, or have you been involved with any campus or off-campus organizations working for human rights? Which ones and what is/was the nature of your involvement?*

I hold experience through on-the-ground advocacy for human rights through my prior work experience and my participation social justice movements. In my position as a fellow with the Communities for our Colleges Coalition, we worked to increase access to education by meeting with Washington State legislators. At these meetings we advocated for the increase in funding for the wrap-around services that could be the obstacle preventing people from receiving an education and policy reform to increase the accessibility to assistance programs. These services would include childcare, transportation, food assistance, and housing. Our work was done with the right for a “standard of living” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) that reflected the declaration of basic human rights. In my work with the Capitol Hill Community Center during the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge on mutual aid. I learned the conflicts to be mindful of, the role of the local government in our operation (or lack thereof), tactics for self-care in advocacy work, sustaining a mutual aid group, and more. Our work was thoroughly challenging because of our inexperience and the social climate of the time, but after the mutual aid center was demolished by the Parks Department, we walked away from our work knowing we made bonds with people who deserved love and compassion. We also walked away from our work with knowledge that can only be acquired through lived experience—this is what makes me enthusiastic to begin this project with hindsight.

## *Stages of Project*

### **Stage I – Foundation**

Timeline: May 1, 2023 – May 26, 2023

Description: This stage is to do the prep work for the recruitment and planning process. The general outline of the system of community outreach has been created but, in this stage, it will be expanded upon with the input of community members.

Objectives:

- Recruit local organizations and share the proposal.
- Create outreach materials to recruit volunteers.
- Solidify details of the outreach network plan with other entities in Tacoma.
- Hold discussions with community members to customize the outreach plan to the primary goals of the community.
- Create materials to be used while the project is active (information cards on local resources for the unhoused—including shelters, supplies, hospitals, etc.)
- Create onboarding materials to train volunteers and maintain a safe environment for all volunteers.
- Finalize the plan of outreach and share the final proposal with community organizations.

### **Stage II – Organizing**

Timeline: May 26, 2023 – June 16, 2023

Description: This period is when volunteers for the project will be organized into their roles, given training, and provided materials to help them be successful. Through the trainings, the

project helps promote communication skills in each other and creates an environment that is sustainable by using emotionally healthy tools for success.

Objectives:

- Give training to volunteers on horizontal leadership, inclusivity/diversity, self-care, collaboration, and conflict-resolution.
- Create a method of organizing donations and find storage.
- Create rotating schedules and assign duties.

### **Stage III – Action**

Timeline: June 20, 2023 – August 27, 2023

Description: This stage is when the plan is put into action in a mindful manner.

Objectives:

- Begin distribution of resources to the Tacoma community.
- Take notes on all the feedback from participants on the project.
- Hold an event the first week of August to discuss the project successes and areas for improvement.

### **Stage IV – Reflection**

Timeline: August 28, 2023 – September 3, 2023

Description: This stage is to take the information produced by the project and utilize it to advocate for housing justice legislation and hold Tacoma City Council accountable for their neglect of unhoused people.

## Objectives:

- Reflect on successes and challenges of project.
- Discuss a sustainability based on the reflection of the community.
- Meet with City Council to discuss the outcomes of the project.
- Publish findings from the project as evidence for future advocacy for housing justice.

## *Conclusion*

The hope is that, with the funding of the Osheroff Grant, the community can come together to work on a project that funds the efforts that mutual aid and advocacy groups have been doing. This project proposal wasn't created solely for this grant and has been in the works for a few months, but I hope that with this project there can be more access to resources, evidence to support the cause for housing justice legislation, and hold Tacoma City Council accountable to their criminalization of the members in this city. Most importantly, this proposal is made with community involvement as the highest priority. All the stages are created to be flexible to the needs of the time, the decisions through community decision-making, and especially the centering of those with lived experience throughout this whole undertaking.

In solidarity,

Faith Rasmussen (she/her), Sophomore at The University of Washington - Tacoma

## References

- Collaborate, Don't Criminalize: How Communities Can Effectively and Humanely Address Homelessness*. (n.d.). The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (U.S. I.C.H.). <https://www.usich.gov/news/collaborate-dont-criminalize-how-communities-can-effectively-and-humanely-address-homelessness>
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- TACOMA, WA., ORDINANCE 28831 (2022).
- United Nations General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1948.