Who is KOSD?

- **KOSD** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to helping refugees from Burma adjust to living in San Diego and enhance their quality of life.

- We provide **programming** and **services** that build community, present and preserve culture, develop youth leadership and promote self-sustainability to this community.
How is **KOSD G.R.O.W.I.N.G.?**

- In close partnership with the Mountain Meadows Mushroom Farm in Escondido, and Mellano & Co. and our many other key partners, we’ve placed 168 refugee workers in job environments in which they’ve been able to thrive.

- But our need for farming job opportunities for our refugees keeps **G.R.O.W.I.N.G.!**

- **G.R.O.W.I.N.G** is a dynamic job placement program which offers culturally appropriate opportunities to refugee farmers and entrepreneurs who may otherwise be unemployable in San Diego.
What is our success?

• Our success would be:
  – A training program reaching 30+ refugee farmers
  – generating revenue for these farmers estimated at $12-15,000 per acre
  – an income-patching model dedicating ¼ acre per farmer to launch a small business and an avenue to sell their produce

* Estimates developed in consultation with IRC’s Food Security and Community Health Supervisor
How will we do it?

• With an initial investment, we’d be able to:
  – Dig irrigation
  – Build a wash station, tool shed, fencing and cooler
  – Purchase an initial investment of layflat, driptape and soil amendments (ongoing expenses)

Estimated material cost: $27,000
Personnel: $20,000
Projected FY1 operating costs: $140,000

Once underway, we’d be able to secure an investment from our ready partners and be able to start **G.R.O.W.I.N.G!**
KEY QUESTIONS FOR G.R.O.W.I.N.G.

Assumptions

KOSD is making a few key assumptions at the launch of GROWING: that our refugee farmers will feel empowered by the gift of the land and that they will see the opportunity for entrepreneurship and the outlets that the organization can make available to sell their produce. Buy in from our farmers is key, to ensure that they’ll readily make the half hour commute to Jamul and are willing to offer their labor in developing the irrigation and related infrastructure on the land.

The testing of this assumption will dictate KOSD’s business model for GROWING. Ideally, KOSD would offer quarter acre plots for refugee farmers to maintain on their own once they’ve established distribution channels for their produce with the help of the organization. If that is not possible, KOSD would likely wish to house the GROWING initiative underneath the umbrella of the organization in order to establish the necessary relationships to make the business side of the initiative feasible. This is already our starting point, despite the desire for GROWING to be a client led business taken up by the community, rather than perpetually maintained by the organization.

Capacity/readiness

The capacity to effectively execute GROWING lies both in the organization and the community that it serves. KOSD as an organization is phenomenally positioned to launch and sustain the organization. KOSD’s Board Secretary and Americorps Vista intern both have a professional background in agriculture and food justice specific to refugee groups living in San Diego. Furthermore, KOSD is nested within a network of organizations that can provide partnerships, insight, and resources to allow the project to flourish, being: Refugee Forum, an association of organizations who work with resettled refugees that could be a source of refugee farmworkers and insight, The IRC, which has already launched and maintains urban farms staffed by resettled refugees in City Heights and El Cajon, and our current partners in our job placement program which have helped to place 168 of our refugee farmers in culturally appropriate agriculture job environments.
The capacity of our clients is twofold: the capacity of our clients to work and make a living off the land, and the capacity as American citizens to navigate the channels necessary for them to make a living from their produce. The first is a well established capacity that our workers come to the with United States already, the latter is complicated by issues of transportation, bureaucracy, and USDA standards to which they would have to adhere in order to sell their produce. Fortunately, the purpose of the organization is to help our clients to navigate, learn, and adhere to the latter standards and complications.

Donors/Investors

Our donors, investors, and customer segments may not have a significant investment in this specific refugee population, but are certainly stakeholders in a farming initiative, refugee populations, and good, organic, sustainably grown produce. The USDA beginning rancher and farmer program exists specifically to help initiatives like ours get off the ground; the Refugee Agriculture Partnership Program is invested already in this initiative. And restaurants like Alchemy and Tiger Tiger in North Park already have and are eager to forge relationships with entities that can provide local, farm to table produce that can also advertise a social metric along with the meals that they provide. With proven success, KOSD can help farmers develop and maintain these relationships further into the life of the program, when the intention will ideally be to help these individuals start their own businesses.

Social Impact Baselines

Our most immediate Social Impact baseline is the creating of jobs and income for our refugee farmers. 100% of our youth program participants live at 138% below the poverty level, and many of their parents have a great deal of difficulty maintaining jobs due to the language barrier and lack of transferrable skills from the jungles of Burma to the urban Jungle of City Heights.

Aside from the creation of jobs and revenue in a vulnerable and underserved community, the more Social Impact Baseline which is more difficult to quantify is the value of getting our community members, some of whom are chronically unemployed, out of their apartments in City Heights, and outdoors into nature,
where they can develop self efficacy by applying their preexisting skill set towards an activity that can help them to achieve their goal of self-sufficiency.

**Product Warranty**

GROWING would be accountable to delivering both a product and service to two different customer segments. Being a nonprofit organization, KOSD’s first responsibility with GROWING is to our refugee farmers. KOSD must ensure that the initiative is culturally appropriate and is responding to a preexisting need in our community. Fortunately, our Committee of Community Leaders meets monthly to assess the community needs and put forth ideas for initiatives that can be taken up by the organization. The idea for GROWING originated here, and the donation of land is what spurred the organization to action.

Once the program is launched, KOSD’s second responsibility would be to the consumers of the produce that GROWING produces. Vegetables would have to be grown and washed to conform with USDA standards, would have to be abundant enough to satisfy the needs of any restaurant partners that we may be able to cultivate, and must be at or below market in comparison to other distribution channels that these consumers may already be receiving produce from.

**Operating Models**

Housed under a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, GROWING would have to behave as such at the onset. All of our current potential funders are grantmaking agencies, and would only invest in the initiative with the metrics of accountability that their grants entail. Our refugee farmers, at the onset, would function as contractors of the organization, and would receive the segment of allotted funds earmarked for staffing, along with overhead for the organization. After GROWING takes root, KOSD would like to explore the possibility of releasing the initiative to the client participants, who could then register formally as a business, B corp, or L3C corporation.
Project Team Experience

As previously stated, the GROWING project team is phenomenally positioned to launch the initiative in a way that is culturally appropriate, aligned with the mission of the organization, and sustainable for program participants. Our land donation comes from Mike Anderson, a retired industrial designer who has spent his retirement developing and maintaining his land with irrigation to support the indigenous vegetation. His desire is to use his excess acreage to achieve a positive social impact, while putting his land to good use. The executive leadership and the Board of the Karen Organization is both versed and positioned to help achieve success in the areas of food justice and agriculture. The organization itself is nested among other likeminded organizations who see KOSD’s unique expertise to offer culturally specific and relevant programs to the community of refugees from Burma living in San Diego.

KOSD as an organization grew out of the community of refugees from Burma living in San Diego’s efforts to organize and provide for itself. It works in tandem with the community that it supports in order to develop programming that is relevant, efficient, and impactful. KOSD was awarded the “Hero Social Work Organization of the Year” by the National Association of Social Workers on March 29th, and received funding from the USD Social Innovation Challenge to launch HOMESPUN, a vocational weaving initiative which reinforces the cultural traditions and artisanal practices that the community brought with it from Burma.

Environment/Resources

Our greatest environmental resource that GROWING will utilize is the donation of land near the population that the Karen Organization of San Diego serves. Several clients of similar initiatives have dropped out of participation due to distance. Many farms that do similar work is in North County San Diego, namely Encinitas and Oceanside. With a similar service offered much closer to home for our City Heights residents, GROWING is tapping in to an existing need and providing a more accessible service to the community.

GROWING is not reinventing the wheel. In 2010, Michelle Obama visited the New Roots Community Farm in City Heights, which provided the model with which GROWING was developed. Urban gardening and farm to table initiatives are
sprouting up across the United States and GROWING seeks to harness some of that momentum to benefit job ready segment of the community of refugees from Burma in San Diego that KOSD serves.

**Social Impact Mantras**

GROWING’s social impact mantra, most simply stated, is the creating of jobs in an underemployed segment of the community of refugees from Burma living in San Diego. In context:

*Growing is an initiative of the Karen Organization of San Diego (KOSD) that will place resettled refugees from Burma living in San Diego in culturally appropriate job environments that will promote their growth as individuals and entrepreneurs. With a donation of 2.5 acres that we have already secured, we will provide an otherwise unemployable segment of this community with opportunities to utilize the skill set they cultivated as farmers in their homeland, in their new home and environment. Working in partnership with other refugee resettlement agencies in San Diego, KOSD is uniquely positioned: surrounded by expertise, and with a unique grassroots connection to the community, KOSD has the potential to GROW this land and program into a dynamic opportunity for other refugee populations and communities that live in San Diego.*

**Collaborators and Partners**

Our initial list of collaborators and Partners is outlined above in our positioning for success as well as donors and investors. Ultimately, with proven success GROWING would like to be open to collaboration with organizations that support refugee diasporas not specific to Burma in San Diego, as well as other unexplored segments of underserved communities that see value in working the land, and GROWING to create a bigger sense of community among individuals and groups that can find a common purpose in tending to a community garden.