



## **SOMOS Mayfair Board of Directors Appoints Victor Vasquez and Saúl Ramos as Co-Executive Directors, Advancing Shared Leadership Model**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 20, 2022

**San Jose, CA**— The Board of Directors of SOMOS Mayfair (SOMOS) appointed Victor Vasquez and Saúl Ramos as Co-Executive Directors during a public vote, recognizing the leadership the two have shown as Interim Co-Directors over the last six months.

*“Saúl and Victor have our full confidence– in the last year, and their entire tenure, they have shown that they are willing to step up for SOMOS. This decision sends a strong message to staff, neighbors, and stakeholders about the value of a shared leadership that is homegrown, honoring the SOMOS Mayfair brand of professional development, and connecting our movement values to our leadership vision,”* said Julie Ramirez, Board Chair.

SOMOS has continued to carry out its mission and adapt to emerging needs during the pandemic under the guidance of Victor and Saúl. In the last year, they have supported the [Si Se Puede Collective](#) in securing additional funding from the Public Health Department to continue COVID outreach, explore the creation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC), and advocate for a multi-million-dollar County investment that increases medical coverage for low-income families. They have increased alignment across SOMOS programs, defined new priorities through collective decision-making, and engaged with community, staff and Board regularly.

In August 2021, the Board of Directors formed the Executive Transition Committee to oversee the executive leadership transition of SOMOS following the departure of longtime Executive Director Camille Llanes-Fontanilla. An intentional decision was made to explore the viability of a co-directorship model, a natural extension of the tradition of shared leadership embraced throughout SOMOS' history.

Co-Executive Leadership is also a response to high rates of nonprofit executive burnout as documented in CompassPoint's "Daring to Lead" national studies over 2006 to 2013.

Across the nonprofit sector, the “Solo-Top-Leadership” model is being questioned for its health and sustainability. Executive Directors have cited the stress of working long hours to cover their broad range of responsibilities, and of feeling lonely and unsupported in their leadership journey. There is also increasing awareness that the Solo-Top-Leadership structure has taken shape in contexts of white supremacy and capitalist economics where decisions, connections, and solutions come from one person in a position of power. Operating under such a model creates an unrealistic expectation and disproportionately impacts organizations led by leaders of color and the communities they serve.

The Executive Transition Committee invited Najla Gomez and J. Ishida to steward an organizational assessment and executive leadership analysis to inform the transition and the Board’s final decision. Najla Gómez and J. Ishida’s approach involved hands-on learning with the Board, staff, and community leaders. In addition to the Executive Transition Committee, SOMOS formed a Community Transition Committee composed of 7 community leaders and staff, including 3 community leaders who are also staff members. The Community Transition Committee worked closely with Najla and J. to explore community-led leadership within the Co-Executive Directorship model and beyond.

*“We believe in the power of shared leadership that comes from the community, and see it as a strategy that challenges the pervasive professionalism of white supremacy. We are excited to have Co-Directors who share our lived experience of being people of color operating under systems of oppression. Saúl and Victor will continue to offer permanent solutions for our community,”* said Dilza Gonzalez, community leader and staff member of the Community Transition Committee.

The Community Transition Committee embraces the Co-Executive Directorship as a significant element in an organization-wide practice of community-led, distributed, and shared leadership. Through this process, SOMOS Mayfair has developed a deeper understanding of the concrete steps needed for institutional change that centers resident- and community-based leadership at every level of the organization.

*“Community voice and collective decision-making has always been at the center of SOMOS Mayfair’s beliefs, values, and culture. There is no better way to amplify that than the Co-Directorship Model, which demonstrates how, at the highest level of staff leadership, better decisions are made through multiple perspectives, strengths, and shared power,”* said Saúl Ramos, Co-Executive Director.

Over the past nine years, Saúl and Victor have cumulatively held nearly every position at SOMOS Mayfair from contractors and line staff to directors of various programs. They have helped build the organization from the ground up, developing the SOMOS Promotores

leadership model, and shaping the strategies that have propelled SOMOS Mayfair’s five-fold growth, and increased its impact on individuals and systems.

*“It’s an honor to hold this position, and to build on the personal history and trusting relationships Saúl and I both have in this community. Through this co-directorship model, we can continue to redistribute power in a way that builds community power, shifts the non-profit industry, and creates a more equitable neighborhood for everybody,”* said Victor Vasquez, Co-Executive Director.

To learn more about this process and how SOMOS Mayfair will continue to grow as a community-led organization dedicated to systems change, join Victor, Saúl, the Community Transition Committee and SOMOS staff for a [“Learning with the Directors” brown bag lunch on August 25th, 2022 from 12-1:30pm.](#)

To celebrate 25 years of building community power with SOMOS Mayfair, [early-bird tickets for the “Gracias a la Vida” Annual Gala are available until August 15, 2022.](#)



*Pictured: SOMOS Mayfair’s Co-Executive Directors, Victor Vasquez (left) and Saúl Ramos (right)*

### **About Victor Vasquez**

Victor was born in Mexico and migrated to Oakland, CA at the age of 10. As a high school student, he organized against the unjust school discipline practices and pushed for

alternatives to suspension that resulted in the creation of the One Land One People Youth Center at Skyline High School. He joined SOMOS with extensive experience working with youth and families as an organizer, case manager, after-school coordinator, and school-community organizer. He is excited to continue working at SOMOS Mayfair to increase community decision making power, push forward alternative solutions and change systems to create a more vibrant and self-determined Mayfair community. Victor holds a Master's degree in Chicano Studies with an emphasis in community resistance and education from San Jose State University and a BA in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

### **About Saúl Ramos**

Saúl Ramos brings over 20 years of work experience serving immigrant communities in different capacities to the SOMOS team. He is a proud son of unionized cannery workers and farmworkers. Although he was born in Watsonville, California, Saúl spent his childhood in the Mexican coastal city of Tepic. Saúl came back to the United States at the age of 16, and as a "US-born monolingual immigrant," he shared in similar experiences of cultural dislocation as his peers who were struggling to establish roots in the United States. He's held positions at a family foundation, school district, and several non-profit organizations. Saúl was the Deputy Director of Administration at SOMOS before serving as a Co-Director. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from UC Berkeley.

### **About SOMOS Mayfair**

SOMOS Mayfair builds community power in East San José through leadership development and by organizing around resident-led solutions. Our mission is to support children, organize families, and connect neighbors to uplift the dreams, power, and leadership of the community and address systemic inequities. [www.somosmayfair.org](http://www.somosmayfair.org)

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### **Media Contact**

Chelsey Prewitt

Marketing & Communications Manager, SOMOS Mayfair

[ccartwright@somosmayfair.org](mailto:ccartwright@somosmayfair.org) | 408-457-4645