

1 April 2025

Dear Selection Committee,

I highly recommend **Meghan Carranza** for the 2025 Administrative Professional (AP) Contribution Awards. For the last 10 years, Meghan Carranza has worked for two Upward Bound projects in north rural Washington. First as the advisor/college coach and then as the Director for both grant projects. Upward Bound (UB) is a federally funded TRIO grant that prepares and motivates low-income, potential first-generation college students, and academically at-risk high school students to pursue post-secondary education.

In alignment with Washington State University's (WSU) land-grant mission, WSU applied for these grants to do early outreach and encourage higher education to a student population that is not usually college-bound. These current two TRIO programs serve students in Okanogan and Douglas counties. The first grant started at WSU in 2004 and now serves 52 students from Paschal Sherman Indian School, Omak, and Okanogan high schools annually, with over 400 students served to date. In 2022 the South grant began, serving 60 students from Bridgeport, Lake Roosevelt, and Nespelem high schools each year. Upward Bound provides academic support year-round and opportunities to visit college campuses and universities to students that would not otherwise have that opportunity. In addition, there is a Bridge Internship Program, in collaboration with USDA laboratories at WSU, that provides graduating seniors the opportunity to reside on campus and collaborate with USDA scientists during the summer between their senior year of high school and their freshman year of college. Since its inception in 2011, the summer Bridge Internship program has positively impacted the lives of 44 students from Okanogan County.

Operating outside the Pullman campus, Meghan and her team often go unrecognized, serving as the unsung heroes who represent higher education and WSU. Their efforts help to make WSU more accessible and visible in rural communities. Since she joined WSU, she has made important contributions as she serves from a place of authenticity, humility, and commitment to the betterment of students, staff and rural communities. She has played a vital role in leading, developing, and positively impacting both students and colleagues. As the Director, she provides leadership, innovative problem-solving, and solid management for UB despite some unique challenges of being rural and without resources. I appreciate her dedication to UB, the Office for Access & Opportunity (A&O), and WSU, and her commitment to facilitating solid educational experience for the students in the program.

Meghan has impressive executive functioning skills, is always prompt with requests, such as annual performance reports (APRs) submissions, and is thoughtful and reflective when offering recommendations. One year, she, unfortunately, had to close out a former grant with the office in a school district, provide referrals, prepare records for retention, and create the final report to close out UB North. At the same time, she needed to set up a brand-newly funded grant (UB South),

transition staff, and work through some challenges with a specific school. But even during these challenging times, she continued to hold onto the notion of needing to move forward for her students, her team, and her community and was willing to tackle whatever structural or budget challenges she faced.

Meghan consistently exceeds expectations and adapts to various roles, especially given her distance from WSU Pullman. At times, we rely on her to tackle IT issues, budget systems, and other operational challenges that would typically be easier dealt with if she were on campus. In a traditional setting, she could easily connect with key individuals or gather necessary resources in person. However, she often has to figure things out on her own. Yet, she maintains a proactive attitude and utilizes her strong problem-solving skills to learn new tools and address any issues she encounters. As the UB Director, Meghan remains focused, receptive to feedback, and composed during crises and challenges.

Consistent staffing is key to a successful operation for these pre-college programs and Meghan is an individual who continues to provide the necessary leadership, management, evaluation, and day-to-day operation of Upward Bound, and holds a deep understanding of the issues faced by the grant's target population. Yes, her performance is far-reaching and compelling in so many ways. Her tenure in the position and level of expertise has proven to be extremely valuable for the current and future success of these grant projects, their impact on the schools, respective communities, and the students the program encourages to pursue post-secondary education. She embodies essential leadership qualities and provides intentional management, insightful evaluation, and a student-centered approach to the operations of Upward Bound. She also believes in the importance of developing staff and fostering a community of practice, which is why she is co-chairing the regional NAEOP (Northwest Association of Education Opportunity Programs) TRIO conference this year in Spokane. This initiative highlights her commitment to professional development and collaboration, ensuring that staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to support students effectively and ultimately enhance the services provided to students in need.

What stands out most about Meghan, and why I believe she deserves this award, is her ability to navigate the complexities of her role with grace. She consistently reflects on her commitment to excellence and the success of the program. Her performance over the years, along with her increasing responsibilities, has been particularly noteworthy. I understand this is a challenging decision with so many deserving candidates. I appreciate the committee's consideration and am happy to provide any further support needed in the evaluation process. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lucila Loera".

Lucila Loera
Executive Director