Protecting the Rights and Dignity of All Californians

Immigrants have long been an integral part of America’s social fabric, bringing their cultural traditions, perspectives, talents, and entrepreneurial spirit to build vibrant communities and local economies. Despite their many contributions, immigrants also have been the subject of fearmongering and discrimination, particularly in the last few years as seismic shifts in federal policies and outright hostility have threatened the fundamental rights and wellbeing of immigrant families and the communities where they live.

Efforts to demonize and criminalize immigrants and refugees have sparked a crisis response from movement leaders and social activists across the country, many of whom have mobilized to support immediate legal needs and the crisis at the border. At the same time, a growing cadre of foundations have responded with an unprecedented surge of rapid response grantmaking to support organizations working on the front lines to defend and protect immigrant rights.

California has been at the forefront of this surge with the public, private, and philanthropic community taking a firm stance against anti-immigrant policies and divisive rhetoric. The James Irvine Foundation (The Foundation) is one of several California foundations that has stepped up its support to protect immigrant rights, joining forces with other partners across the state to bolster collective and mutually reinforcing efforts. As part of its grantmaking to a range of nonprofit partners, The Foundation seeks to ensure that everyone of California’s low-income workers – many of whom are immigrants – have the power to advance economically.

To better understand the effect of rapid response grantmaking and the current landscape for immigrant integration in California, The Foundation commissioned this practice brief to explore the various ways California foundations are contributing to a pro-immigrant movement. It is based on a developmental evaluation of The Foundation’s Protecting Immigrant Rights (PIR) efforts and interviews with 12 foundations and immigrant rights organizations. It seeks to

“We were concerned that all the progress California has made – and we have been investing in – was going to be upended by fear mongering and the vilification of immigrants in the political debate.”

Don Howard
CEO of The James Irvine Foundation
provide actionable insights for funders and immigrant-serving organizations as they pivot from crisis-response to more proactive and longer-term strategy for immigrant integration.¹

The current moment has called for immediate and bold action with an eye for the future and a long-term strategy to ensure an inclusive democracy where everyone has opportunities to thrive. Not only is immigration a centerpiece of the American story, it is also a cross-cutting issue that intersects with health, education, economic development, housing, criminal justice, and many other issues foundations and social sector practitioners care about. While there is still considerable uncertainty on the road ahead, much can be learned from the immigrant experience and the philanthropic response in California, a state that often serves as a bellwether for the rest of the country.²

This practice brief was developed several months before the catastrophic spread of the COVID-19 virus, which has since become the worst public health and economic crisis of the century. COVID-19 has laid bare the stark racial and ethnic disparities in our society and painful consequences of exclusionary policies. Once again, many immigrants have been excluded from emergency relief despite representing a large portion of the critical occupations on the front lines of this pandemic. While the world has changed dramatically, the insights in the brief are as relevant as ever and can help inform ongoing efforts to create an inclusive democracy that embraces and welcomes immigrants. Field insights are framed around four inter-connected themes (see below) and are followed by considerations for future efforts.

- **Balance the urgent crisis with long-term vision:** Immigrant rights organizations are struggling to balance immediate needs with a longer-term vision, given the magnitude of need and their limited capacity.

- **Invest in building resilient organizations and movement infrastructure:** Flexible multi-year grants coupled with technical assistance and opportunities to build solidarity provide organizations with the ability to be nimble, responsive, and resilient.

- **Foster trust, regional partnership, and equity:** Funders that show up as allies and engage in trust-based philanthropy³ enable grassroots organizations and community leaders to do what they do best.

- **Leverage reputational capital to promote a pro-immigrant narrative:** Funders can leverage their reputational capital, influence, and voice to promote field building and a narrative of inclusion.

### Key Themes and Takeaways

**Balance the urgent crisis with long-term vision**

*Immigrant rights organizations are struggling to balance immediate needs with a longer-term vision, given the magnitude of need and their limited capacity*

While some foundations have a long history of rapidly deploying funds in times of crisis, the level of rapid response funding in the wake of the 2016 presidential election has been unprecedented.⁴ With new assaults on vulnerable communities cropping up on a weekly—sometimes daily—basis, many foundations are recognizing the importance of supporting nonprofit partners to respond to crises in their communities as they arise. In the current political climate,

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¹ See Appendix for full list of interview participants.


³ Trust-based philanthropy is a set of principles championed by organizations like the Whitman Institute. This includes flexible multi-year operating support, trusting and transparent interactions, support for peer learning and technical assistance, and streamlined reporting. For more information see [https://thewhitmaninstitute.org/grantmaking/trust-based-philanthropy/](https://thewhitmaninstitute.org/grantmaking/trust-based-philanthropy/)

rapid response funding is a particularly useful tool for foundations that seek to support immigrants and refugees. A recent Urban Institute blog suggested rapid response funds can help the philanthropic sector respond more nimbly to threats to families at the border. Specifically, it emphasizes how rapid response funds can address immediate needs by mobilizing resources to the front lines more quickly than standard grantmaking, minimizing barriers to entry such as cumbersome application and disbursement processes, and increasing the flexibility and adaptability that organizations need to execute their strategies. In addition to supporting families at the border, rapid response funding has been essential to acting on many regulatory and policy threats to immigrants and refugees, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), family separation at the border, privatized detention centers in California, and access to health services for immigrants.

While the rapid deployment of grant dollars in a time of crisis is important, it also can have downsides when not effectively and strategically deployed to achieve a longer-term vision. Even the meaning of “rapid response” grantmaking can look and feel different depending on context and longer-term needs. As several California funders noted, rapid response funds often support direct services rather than activities that foster a longer-term pro-immigrant agenda.

“There’s just so much need out there, and we have to make choices,” explained Bob Uyeki, CEO of Y&H Soda Foundation, “not just between funding [specific] services, but [between direct services and] organizing, advocacy, and power-building strategies.” A recent analysis of post-2016 immigration-related grantmaking by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) revealed the vast majority of funding went to legal services. While these resources undoubtedly helped individuals facing detention and deportation, relatively little funding has supported the “long game” of movement and power building.

Others noted that philanthropic investments in time-bound campaigns and projects do not position the field to be resiliency and can actually be destabilizing. As Daranee Petsod, President of GCIR, noted, some key anti-immigrant groups have been “bankrolled by a few foundations for decades, and all the gains they’re making now are the result of those decades of investment.” In contrast, current pro-immigrant funding tends to focus on discrete projects with set outcomes, which does little to strengthen organizations over the long term. As a result, nonprofits often feel compelled to adapt their programs and strategies to align with funding streams. According to one grantee, “you pivot because you need to. We have been so conditioned to live within the scarcity model of resourcing our organizations, that I can't blame certain organizations that take the opportunity. But if it is being driven by funding rather than by mission, it's not going to succeed in the long term. And that's not a healthy way to do social change work because it isn't sustainable.” Short-term funding can even destabilize nonprofits if they are forced to reduce services or let staff go at the end of grants.

5 https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/rapid-response-philanthropy-can-help-multiple-organizations-support-families-border
These critiques point to the need for a longer-term vision. Petsod observed that while the “pie” of resources for crisis response has increased, there is a need to “not just fund what we’re against but invest in what we’re for. Unfortunately, the field as a whole has been forced to put out multiple fires and has not had adequate time or resources to define, much less work towards, an affirmative long-term strategy and vision.”

An evaluation of The Foundation’s PIR investments provided further evidence with grantees in most regions acknowledging they had limited capacity to do any kind of advocacy work. In fact, most grants to community-based organizations (CBOs) were used to fund legal assistance and other direct services. Several intermediaries (mainly regional community foundations) observed that community-based grantees have no bandwidth to co-create a longer-term vision.

Funders and pro-immigrant movement leaders have been grappling with this tension and seeking ways to collectively pivot from a reactive to a proactive stance. In 2019, The Foundation partnered with the Institute for the Future and GCIR to convene peer funders and advocates in scenario planning and long-term visioning for immigrant integration.7 There is general consensus among foundation partners that they need to stay abreast of immigration-related developments and provide leadership when the time comes. Shelley Hoss, President and CEO of the Orange County Community Foundation, explained, “The best thing that we can do as California-based philanthropy is to continue building capacity, infrastructure, data, and learning.” She believes California can provide leadership and serve as a national role model, by being “ready to capitalize on the moment we have an opportunity on the national policy stage.”

**Invest in building resilient organizations and movement infrastructure**

Flexible multi-year grants coupled with technical assistance and opportunities to build solidarity can provide organizations with the ability to be nimble, responsive, and resilient

In times of crisis, nonprofit organizations must often make decisions about how and when to pivot in real-time. Multi-year core operating support allows grantees the flexibility to use funds strategically. “Whenever you have a stressor on your organization - because all of a sudden something's changed in the external environment – it is core support from the philanthropic community that allows nonprofits to flex their strategies and be nimble to respond to the needs of the community,” reflected Jennifer Pippard, Director of Strategic Partnerships for First 5 Los Angeles.

Core operating support and multi-year funding also can provide critical resources for nonprofits to engage in capacity building. The National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), an Irvine grantee, explained, “Core general support grants are important...and grants in support of capacity are vital. More so now than ever, given the challenges of the Trump administration, because the task of building and flying the plane at the same time is more perilous given the unrelenting crisis of it all.” In addition, receiving operating support allows grantees the opportunity to innovate and develop creative solutions for pressing immigration issues. As Cynthia Buiza of California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC)

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7 The USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration defines integration as "improved economic mobility for, enhanced participation by, and receiving society openness to immigrants."
shared, “[Core operating support] can speed up our creativity and capacity to be bolder with our programming. We're now able to imagine more solutions in convening because we're not constantly thinking ... How are we going to pay for this? Are we going to find the right people? The right talent?” She shared that multi-year funding is helping their organization “plan better, raise money better, and scaffold the organization with opportunities to plan for the long term because there is...less of a scarcity model in fundraising.”

Overall, the evaluation of the PIR portfolio revealed high praise among grantees for the flexibility to shift strategies in response to emerging needs on the ground. One PIR grantee noted, “The PIR initiative has demonstrated significant flexibility in allowing grantees to adjust advocacy strategies, messaging, and tactics as needed to respond to the current political landscape. While the drumbeat has remained relatively steady, the ability to engage in timely issues like employer rapid response allows us to facilitate timely and appropriate messaging as needed.”

“We believe the Foundation can use its voice in philanthropy spaces to broaden support for organizing and movement sustainability.”
~ Irvine PIR grantee

Foster trust, regional partnerships, and equity
Funders that show up as allies and engage in trust-based philanthropy enable grassroots organizations and community leaders to do what they do best

Despite the increase in funding for immigrant rights in California, the need to quickly deploy resources often means grants to larger well-known nonprofits rather than smaller CBOs working with immigrant communities. Many CBOs in under-resourced regions of the state (such as the Inland Empire and Central Valley) are often up against local leaders and residents that are less welcoming to immigrants or sympathetic to immigrant issues. Supporting these smaller organizations requires a considerable amount of trust, risk-tolerance, and a long-term commitment to equity in grantmaking. Funders that show up as allies and engage in trust-based philanthropy are better positioned to create social, political, and economic equity while alleviating power imbalances in the social sector.8

Many of the peer funders we interviewed recognize the key role smaller nonprofits play and stressed the need to develop organizational capacity and trusting relationships with these smaller base-building organizations. “Grant-making in this space requires a willingness to trust the organizations you're working with,” shared Fred Ali, CEO of the Weingart Foundation. “They tend to be smaller and under-capitalized. They don't tend to have the characteristics of the grantees that a lot of foundations like to fund and so you have to be willing to take on a bit more risk. You might not see the assets that you want to see on the balance sheet or the experience of staff or the donor base. You have to be willing to see other kinds of assets like connection to community and connection to the issue. Those sorts of things are really important.”

The Foundation and other funders have partnered with regional intermediaries – primarily community foundations - who bring a keen understanding of the local landscape and connections to trusted community-based organizations. Pippard of First 5 Los Angeles also highlighted the need for effective mechanisms, such as partnerships with other funders or intermediaries to quickly fund smaller grassroots organizations on the ground. “[Our] goal was to reach some of the smaller CBOs that were on the ground providing a variety of services to immigrant families, often as the initial point of contact or a trusted point of contact for the families. We would not have been effective the way [the partner funder] was as we tend to grant to very large organizations. The only way to get to those ‘boots on the ground,’ those small organizations, [was] to go through a [regional] funder or some intermediary.”

8 https://thewhitmaninstitute.org/grantmaking/trust-based-philanthropy/
In a state where most philanthropic dollars flow to major metropolitan areas, some regions have been traditionally under-resourced. As one peer funder reflected, “We need to diversify our geographic reach because many people can no longer afford these big cities with sky-rocketing real estate challenges and widening income inequality. We need to go where people are trying to build their lives. It’s in the far-flung regions [in the state] where the future is going to be.” The Foundation opted to concentrate its efforts in some of those “far-flung regions” and with smaller organizations in California’s Central Valley and Inland Empire, while also partnering in key Southern California regions like Orange County and San Diego. One notable characteristic of its PIR strategy has been to partner with regional intermediaries – primarily local community foundations – to help build regional capacity and disburse grant funding to smaller organizations that might otherwise be overlooked.

Equally important has been The Foundation’s relational, trust-based approach to grantmaking, which is evident in how it interacts with funded partners and intermediaries. Intermediary partners commented that The Foundation has served as an ally and supportive partner rather than dictating who and how they should fund. They praised The Foundation’s trust, partnership, and support for regional efforts without undue interference or onerous reporting requirements. One noted, “What stands out about The James Irvine Foundation is the genuine approach for building solid relationships and using those relationships as a way of understanding how their philanthropic investments can really help build capacity.” Recognizing that regional intermediaries knew their communities better, they sought to understand their needs and provide them with additional tools and resources to strengthen immigrant-serving infrastructure.

According to a recent report on pro-immigrant movement funding from the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), just 1% of all grant dollars from the largest 1,000 foundations in the country goes to support immigrants and refugees. In fact, between 2014 and 2016, half of all pro-immigrant movement funding in the United States came from just 11 foundations—four of which are based in California (The James Irvine Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, The California Endowment, and Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund). Despite increased demand for services to defend immigrant rights and the dire need for multi-year general operating support, there is still a significant gap in funding.

Peer funders agreed philanthropy needs to do more than rapid response grantmaking to address the current immigration crisis and pave the way for a more inclusive future. As Petsod puts it, philanthropy at large tends to focus on incremental change while the moment calls for more radical, transformative change. “I’m a huge believer in incremental change,” she shared, “but what’s happening [in immigration] right now requires radical strategies and

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**Leverage reputational capital and influence to promote a pro-immigrant narrative**

Funders can leverage their reputational capital, influence, and collective voice to promote field building and a narrative of inclusion.

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10 Foundation Center data for grants between 2011 and 2015
These strategies compel foundations to be bolder and take more risks. Some have started to do so—for example, signing public statements critical of anti-immigrant policies and writing a joint letter to the Secretary of Commerce about adding a citizenship question to the census. Nonetheless, peer funders agreed that these times call for even more bold and decisive actions.

Given that immigration falls under the purview of federal policy, few California funders focus on immigration as a singular grantmaking priority. However, champions within foundations can make a case for how immigrant issues intersect with their funding priorities and overall mission. Quite a few California foundations have seen it as a moral imperative, with a handful responding within weeks of the 2016 elections to divisive campaign rhetoric and proposed policies. Don Howard, CEO of The Foundation, recalled, “We were quite concerned that all the progress that California had made and we had been investing in was going to be upended by the fear mongering and vilification of immigrants in the political debate.” The California Endowment also responded swiftly, funding a range of organizations working to defend vulnerable populations and the historic gains California made to expand health insurance coverage as part of the Affordable Care Act. As Marion Standish, Senior Vice President of The California Endowment noted, “We are a health funder, so while we have to thread the needle a little bit in terms of how we show up, I think we can [do so] for immigrant integration in this terribly hostile environment.”

In many ways, immigration has galvanized collaboration among California funders and movement leaders in ways not seen before. It has mobilized the sector and built capacity to rapidly and collectively respond to a range of new threats. Funders have responded with both resources and their reputational capital, often joining forces to publicly speak out and submit public comment in opposition to regulatory changes on a variety of issues. For example, there has been an unprecedented level of funding and collaboration to ensure an accurate count in the 2020 Census, much of which built on networks and capacities that were established in support of immigrant rights. According to Shelley Hoss, President and CEO of the Orange County Community Foundation and an Irvine PIR intermediary, the work they did to develop a regional rapid response network to defend immigrant rights helped build their capacity to pivot to emergent issues like the 2020 Census. She noted that the 2020 Census “is [now] one of our highest priorities and the capacity [to respond] has been fueled enormously by the investments in our immigration work.”

The Foundation and other funders also have been well-positioned to serve as a pragmatic voice of reason, promoting a narrative of inclusion during politically divisive times. Armed with data and a bird’s eye view of the state landscape, statewide funders can play a critical role in promoting constructive data-driven dialogue and advancing a narrative focused on inclusion and belonging. In fact, many have jointly funded critical narrative change work such as the Blueprint for Belonging (B4B), a collaborative effort coordinated by the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley. That said, more resources are needed to deepen and expand narrative change. A recent report from the National Center for Progressive Philanthropy underscores the need for more resources to reverse a powerful anti-immigrant narrative that shifts the hearts and
minds of policymakers and the general public. Those we interviewed shared similar concerns with one funder intermediary reflecting, “I think what it takes to move people who aren’t with us, who are in the middle or who are on the fence, is some deep narrative work...we really need to shift both culture and narrative around immigrants and refugees and asylum seekers.”

Implications for the Future

This is a unique moment in history when foundations and social sector leaders are challenged to think differently about immigration – not as a singular issue but one that cuts across diverse grant portfolios and efforts to address health equity, economic mobility, education, environmental issues, and a range of social sector issues. In addition to shifts in grantmaking practices, this moment presents an opportunity for innovative shifts in strategy and the overall role of philanthropic actors in supporting an inclusive democracy and constructive civic discourse. The catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic brings new challenges as well as opportunities to re-imagine and transform exclusionary policies, systems, and narratives. Thought leaders such as the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and conversations with California funders and field leaders point to the following best practices and considerations:

Provide multi-year flexible funding to support organizing capacity and power building infrastructure

Local and statewide organizations need flexible, multi-year funding to respond to the immediate crisis as well as build sustainable capacity for long-term immigrant integration efforts. As multiple sources noted, many organizations – particularly small grassroots nonprofits in under-resourced regions of the state – are running on fumes with limited capacity beyond day-to-day emergency response. Many of these organizations form the state’s grassroots civic infrastructure and work on a multitude of intersectional issues that impact their communities. Strengthening their capacity and power building infrastructure in regions across the state can have lasting and long-term benefits well beyond immigration and the current political crisis.

Pursue equity-focused grantmaking by cultivating trusting relationships and streamlining processes

To increase equity in funding and support emerging community organizations, funders should seek ways to streamline processes and deepen their relationships with intermediary partners, peer funders, and grantees. The efforts of The Foundation and other funders demonstrate the power of listening and acting upon what they hear. Community insights and lessons learned should not be a closely held secret but rather shared to help build trust and a collective vision for moving forward. For larger statewide foundations, partnering with regional intermediaries (such as regional community foundations) can be an effective way to provide deeper support to grassroots nonprofits in under-resourced regions. However, identifying an intermediary and streamlining processes is not enough. Funders also need to invest time and energy in building trusting partnerships, showing-up as an ally, engaging stakeholders, and investing in the capacity of regional ecosystems.

Join forces to provide leadership and leverage funding with a clear vision for the long game

Funders can work with one another in a variety of ways to promote coordinated support for statewide and grassroots organizations as well as create critical space for pro-immigrant leaders to develop a shared vision and strategy for immigrant integration. Within weeks of the 2016 elections, leaders from major California foundations began to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas, ultimately leading to a powerful and collective voice on key policy issues such as DACA,

family separation, and public charge. California foundations also have pooled funds to support undocumented students and their families across California’s higher education systems (the California Catalyst Campus Fund) and joined forces with other national funders to advocate for reforms to overly harsh immigrant enforcement policies and educate the public about federal immigration reform (Four Freedoms Fund). The Foundation has funded space for organizations to engage in planning for the future, including risk assessment and scenario planning. Given the uncertainty ahead, funders who support immigrant rights are well-positioned to help convene stakeholders and facilitate these critical learning and planning efforts.

Invest in shifting mindsets and promoting a narrative of inclusion

Funders can further leverage their reputational capital, including public statements in support of immigrants, speaking out, and bridging perspectives among a variety of audiences including government, nonprofit, and the private sector. As Rev. Ryan M. Ellis of formerly of Define America notes, “rapid response is important, but funders must also invest in shifting culture.” In addition to grantmaking, California funders can play a critical role in promoting a narrative of inclusion centered around values, opportunities, and immigrant contributions. Some stakeholders would like to see California foundations leverage their reputational capital and act more boldly in this space. Suggested strategies include leveraging quality research and data to promote learning and foster productive dialogue to counter misconceptions about immigrants. Others suggested tapping into the entertainment industry and pop culture as another avenue for shifting mindsets and public perceptions. One intermediary described efforts to develop a collaborative that would “open up pipelines in the entertainment industry to allow more authentic stories to be told on television, movies, other kind of entertainment platforms.” The Pop Collaborative, established in 2016, is an example of innovative effort that brings together philanthropic resources and learning to transform the narrative landscape. Fostering cross-sector partnerships is key to shifting narratives, mindsets, and policies. More attention and resources are needed to promote a pro-immigrant narrative and an inclusive democracy where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

“Philanthropy is not set up to address existential threats to our democracy, but given what's at stake, the sector absolutely must step up. And I think we're all grappling with how best to do that.”

Daranee Petsod, GCIR

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14 https://www.haasjr.org/perspectives/letters-from-the-vp/california-campus-catalyst-fund
15 https://www.unboundphilanthropy.org/four-freedoms-fund
16 https://www.ncrp.org/2018/08/rapid-response-support-is-important-but-immigration-funders-must-also-invest-in-shifting-culture.html
17 https://popcollab.org/
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