

**Metropolitan Variation in Immigrant Justice Funding:
Foundations and the DACA Program[▼]**

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Introduction

Foundations have long supported nongovernmental organizations that are part of the immigrant justice movement in the United States (e.g., Nicholls, Uitermark, and van Haperen 2020; Preston 2014; Zeidel 2009). Yet, support to immigrants and refugees represents only a very small percentage of foundation funding in the United States (i.e., 1.8% between 2016-2020) (NCRP 2022). These philanthropic resources have nonetheless helped service organizations offer an array of programming and services, including English language classes and assorted immigration legal services (e.g., Hing 2000). This foundation support has also enabled advocacy organizations to influence immigrant-related policies and practices at all government levels (e.g., Woodwell, Jr. 2021). And foundations have supported research in immigrant communities (such as through focus groups, listening sessions, and public opinion surveys), trainings to develop the next generation of immigrant rights leaders, and workshops to help develop effective advocacy strategies.

Existing research on foundations' role in the immigration space has focused largely on *national funders* of immigrant rights causes, especially in established gateway states such as California, New York, and Illinois (NCRP 2022). Notably, scholarship discusses the support of the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Open Society Foundations, and Unbound Philanthropy during critical moments in the immigrant justice movement in the United States. Researchers highlight philanthropic support for organizations that helped undocumented immigrants to obtain legal status after passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (Meissner and Papademetriou 1988) and legal immigrants to obtain U.S. citizenship after federal welfare reform legislation in 1996 restricted their access to public benefits, including food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (Hing 2000). They also highlight the role of a small group of national foundations in supporting state and local immigrant advocacy in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks, which fueled anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment across the nation (Sullivan and Shorr 2021; Woodwell, Jr. 2021), and following Donald Trump's election to the U.S. presidency in 2016 (Moorehead 2017).

Especially today, as much of immigration policy-making is subnational, it is also important to understand how *local foundations* are supporting the immigrant justice movement. Not only has the greater geographic dispersion in immigrant settlement in recent decades highlighted the ongoing need for immigrant services and advocacy across the country, but the prolonged absence of comprehensive immigration reform has underscored the promise of and need for state and local

immigration policy activism to build grassroots pressure for broader federal reforms. At the same time, due to the work of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)—the nation’s only immigrant-focused philanthropy mobilizing organization active since 1990—a growing number of foundations have started to support immigrant and refugee issues nationally and locally (NCRP 2022). Local foundations, in particular, are well-positioned to invest in local immigrant-focused organizations, thereby building and strengthening the spine of a grassroots-led immigrant justice movement. This paper examines exactly how local foundations have embraced immigration and immigrant rights issues in recent years. Based on a decade of organizational research, we examine regional differences in how local foundations are investing in the immigrant justice movement, what they are investing in, and the types of relationships they are developing with grantees and other funders.

To do so, we examine local foundation support for organizations involved with implementing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a federal policy that since 2012 has provided a temporary (two-year) and renewable stay of deportation and work authorization to over 835,000 undocumented youth (DHS 2023). We analyze foundation support for DACA in three metropolitan regions: the Greater Houston Area (Texas), the San Francisco Bay Area (California), and the New York City Metro Area (New York)—all high-immigrant regions, though with different civic and political contexts related to immigrant rights. We draw on 35 interviews with foundation leaders to show regional variation in local foundations’ investment in the DACA program. Specifically, we discuss differences in how many foundations issued grants, what they invested in, and the strategies they used for developing relationships with grantees and other funders. To explain this metropolitan variation in DACA funding, we show how local civic and political contexts influence foundations’ funding decisions and strategies. Our research thus illustrates the regionally-specific challenges of funding immigrant rights and underscores that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how local foundations can support organizations that are the beating heart of the immigrant justice movement.

Foundation Support for the Immigrant Justice Movement

Foundations are recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as public charities and private foundations with the 501(c)(3) status. These grant-making institutions have long played important roles in American democracy (Anheier and Hammack 2010). Their funding supports nonprofit organizations in delivering essential public goods and services, often to poor and other populations

marginalized by government agencies and programs, including the foreign born. Foundations also fund research and analysis, advocacy and outreach, and organizational capacity building, thereby enabling them to develop and support social movement organizations and shape public policy (O'Connor 2010). While there is ample scholarship scrutinizing the underlying assumptions, motivations, power dynamics, and impacts of foundation behavior (e.g., Faber and McCarthy 2005; Haines 1984; Jenkins 1998; Kohl-Arenas 2015), research has also highlighted foundations' positive impact across multiple service and policy areas, including civil rights, education, health, and the environment (e.g., Chambré 2006; Jenkins and Halci 1999; McCarthy 2004; Reckhow 2013). There is, however, relatively little scholarship on foundations and their funding to organizations serving and advocating for immigrants.

We can learn about foundations' support for pro-immigrant organizations by reviewing their grant making during recent critical moments in the immigrant justice movement. Foundations, for example, supported organizations that helped undocumented immigrants to obtain legal status after passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), a major federal law that created a large-scale amnesty program, instituted employer sanctions, and increased border security (Meissner and Papademetriou 1988). In 1987 and 1988, for example, the Ford Foundation granted over \$3 million to a dozen national and regional organizations in California, New York, and Illinois—states with high concentrations of undocumented immigrants and a relatively good infrastructure of immigrant-serving organizations—to conduct outreach about IRCA and help eligible immigrants apply for legal status (Ford Foundation 1987, 1988). Foundation support during this era, however, was ad hoc, unorganized, and poorly coordinated with government. Unlike today, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the federal agency responsible for IRCA's implementation, was also an active funder and reimbursed qualified organizations \$15 for each legalization application they processed (Hing 1992). Additionally, Congress allocated \$4 billion to reimburse state and local governments for costs incurred to provide basic health and welfare services to IRCA beneficiaries, as well as English and civics classes that these immigrants needed to become permanent residents (Liu 1991).

Foundations also invested in pro-immigrant organizations in 1996, when Congress enacted welfare reform legislation that denied vital public assistance to noncitizen legal immigrants in the United States (Fix 2009). George Soros—the Hungarian-born philanthropist who had created the Open Society Institute in 1993 to promote democratic governance, human rights, and social justice around the world—contributed a staggering \$50 million to the Emma Lazarus Fund (ELF) so that

local organizations could help legal immigrants become U.S. citizens and advocate and litigate for policy changes (Schmitt 1996). By 1999, as a result of ELF, over 500,000 immigrants had been counseled on naturalization and Congress had restored food stamps and Supplemental Security Income to most legal immigrants in the country in 1996 (Hing 2000). ELF also made the immigrant justice movement more collaborative and interconnected through its funding model. Besides directly funding local organizations in New York City and Los Angeles, ELF also transferred funds to community foundations and national and regional immigrant rights organizations elsewhere in the country so that they could re-grant funding to local organizations in their areas. ELF's top-down collaboration model made naturalization assistance funding widely available, ultimately reaching 40 states and Washington, DC (Hing 2000).

In 2003, when anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment was on the rise nationally following the 2001 terrorist attacks, a small group of national foundations created the Four Freedoms Fund (FFF) to pool resources and support state and local pro-immigrant organizations, with the goal of building grassroots pressure for broader federal immigration reforms (Woodwell, Jr. 2021). Housed at NEO Philanthropy (a funder intermediary and aggregator), FFF started relatively small: in 2003, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation collectively invested \$2 million in 21 pro-immigrant organizations in six mostly immigrant gateway states (i.e., California, New York, Illinois, Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin). In 2022, with funding from 19 mostly national foundations, FFF invested nearly \$19 million in 127 organizations in 27 states (FFF 2023). While notably driven and supported by national foundations, FFF's focus has been on building a stronger immigrant justice movement at the state and local levels. Organizational grantees, which are often led by immigrants or individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, or persons of color, have focused on securing pro-immigrant state and local policies and curbing state and local government collaboration in immigration arrests, detentions, and deportations.

Over time, more national foundations have invested in pro-immigrant organizations in traditional gateway states and cities, but increasingly also in newer immigrant destinations in the southern and central regions of the country. Over time, funding from national foundations has been better coordinated through collaborative funding mechanisms like FFF, as well as the New Americans Campaign (created in 2011 to promote naturalization) and the Delivering on the Dream Project (created in 2012 to promote DACA implementation) (de Chinchilla 2023; NAC 2024).

Despite this growing foundation support, the immigrant justice movement is still under-resourced: between 2016 and 2020, when about 14% of the U.S. population was foreign born, only 1.8% of money granted by U.S. foundations went to benefit immigrants and refugees (NCRP 2022). Also, foundation funding is now more geographically dispersed than before and increasingly benefits state and local pro-immigrant organizations (and not only national policy organizations). Yet, there is still a geographical mismatch, and states and localities with the greatest anti-immigrant threat receive the least foundation support (Dubb 2019). Finally, with research focused on a handful of national foundations, we know little about how local foundations are supporting the immigrant justice movement.

Today, local foundations are key supporters of the immigrant justice movement, even as immigration remains a controversial and divisive issue also for the philanthropic sector (Dubb 2019). Since the 1990s, immigrant settlement has moved away from established gateway states and cities toward new destinations, including in suburban and rural areas, highlighting the need for immigrant services and advocacy throughout the United States (Marrow 2011; Roth, Gonzales, and Lesniewski 2015; Singer 2004; Williamson 2018). Simultaneously, the elusive nature of comprehensive immigration reform has underscored the need to build grassroots pressure for broader federal reforms (Colbern and Ramakrishnan 2020; Varsanyi 2010). Unlike national foundations, local foundations are place-based funders that focus on addressing the diverse and evolving needs in specific regions and localities (Mazany and Perry 2014). Local foundations are often led by staff with both deep roots in their communities and established relationships with local stakeholders. As such, local foundations have better insights into local service and policy issues, including how best to influence local legislation and support community-led advocacy initiatives. This paper explores whether and how local foundations have invested in the immigrant justice movement in recent years.

Local foundations' regional focus suggests that their funding decisions and strategies vary across place. While foundation behavior is influenced by factors *internal* to the foundation, notably its mission, values, leadership, and composition of the board of trustees (e.g., Irvin and Kavvas 2020; Kohl-Arenas 2017), this comparative research also explores how factors *external* to the foundation matter as well. We examine how the local infrastructure of nonprofit organizations and the respective state and local immigration policy regimes—what we call the civic and political contexts—influence foundation behavior. Local civic and political contexts matter for immigrants' integration experiences (e.g., de Graauw and Gleeson 2021) and for how city officials go about

local immigration policymaking (e.g., de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016, 2022; Filomeno 2017). Local context also matters for the trajectory of foundation funding and practices (e.g., Martinez-Cosio and Bussell 2012; Suárez, Husted, and Casas 2018). This paper explores how the civic and political contexts of a place shape not only the level of local foundation funding to pro-immigrant organizations, but also what local foundations invest in and the strategies that local foundations use to coordinate with grantees and other funders.

Methods and Data

DACA: A Case Study in Funding Immigrant Justice

We study the role of local foundations in the immigrant justice movement by analyzing their engagement with the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, an initiative of the Obama administration. DACA constitutes the most significant inclusive federal policy change for undocumented immigrants since IRCA enabled 2.7 million of them to legalize their status in the late 1980s (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013). DACA provides two-year and renewable relief from deportation and work authorization for eligible undocumented youth. To access these temporary benefits, undocumented youth have to pay a \$495 fee and demonstrate—in an application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services—that they arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday; have continuously resided in the United States since 15 June 2007; are under the age of 31 on 15 June 2012 when the program was announced; are enrolled in or graduated from a U.S. high school or are a veteran; and have no criminal record. In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked President Trump's 2017 attempt to terminate DACA. Due to ongoing appeals and litigation, however, DACA is available only for current beneficiaries (who can still apply for status renewal), but no new initial DACA applications are being accepted.

Metropolitan Regions of Interest

In the absence of federal funding to promote DACA's implementation, state and local resources—both governmental and nongovernmental—became crucial to inform immigrants about and help them to apply for this program (Singer, Svajlenka, and Wilson 2015). We specifically focus on the role that local foundations have played in funding efforts to implement DACA in three immigrant-dense metropolitan regions across the United States: the Greater Houston Area (Texas), the San Francisco Bay Area (California), and the New York City Metro Area (New York). These regions

all have foreign-born populations well above the national average of 14%.¹ In the Greater Houston Area, the foreign born constitute 24% of the population, compared to 31% in the San Francisco Bay Area and 29% in the New York City Metro Area. At least 40% of immigrants in all these regions are noncitizens, including large numbers of undocumented immigrants, with 57% of immigrants in the Greater Houston Area being noncitizens. In 2012, when DACA was created, Texas, California, and New York were in the top five states with the largest populations of immediately (and potentially) DACA-eligible undocumented youth: 164,000 (223,000) in Texas, 371,000 (507,000) in California, and 69,000 (91,000) in New York (Batalova et al. 2014).

While all high-immigrant regions, they vary in their civic and political contexts related to immigrant rights. The Houston metro region has a relatively sparse and underdeveloped infrastructure of civil society organizations, and the region's relatively few immigrant organizations are concentrated in the urban core (de Graauw and Gleeson 2021, 2024). Several immigrant rights coalitions have emerged across the Houston region in recent decades², but none has had the influence or staying power of comparable coalitions in the other two regions, and no coalition was active when DACA was created (de Graauw and Gleeson 2024). Furthermore, the Houston region has a mixed political context: the city of Houston is currently Democrat leaning while historically being conservative, but Republicans still dominate local politics in many suburban and rural counties ringing the urban core. The area's partisan divisions are reflected in local immigration policies. Seven counties in the Greater Houston Area either recently had or still have a 287(g) agreement that permits local law enforcement to collaborate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to find and deport undocumented immigrants.³ At the same time, the Houston Police Department has refused to permit its officers to get involved in federal immigration enforcement. Also, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner declared Houston a 'welcoming city' in 2016 and disavowed anti-immigrant 'show me your papers' state legislation (Senate Bill 4) enacted in 2017. Overall, Houston officials have created fewer immigrant rights laws and programs than their counterparts in San Francisco and New York City, and the metro region is situated in an overall anti-immigrant state whose policies and practices are heavily focused on immigration enforcement and curtailing immigrant rights. Neither local governments in the Houston region nor the state of Texas made funding available for DACA implementation.

The San Francisco metro region has a much denser and better developed infrastructure of civil society organizations. Indeed, San Francisco's organizational landscape has been called 'hyperpluralist' (Coyle 1988), and the city is home also to many sophisticated immigrant

organizations that are very active in local politics (de Graauw 2016). The nearby cities of Oakland and San Jose also have sizable numbers of immigrant organizations (e.g., Carillo 2024; Gleeson 2012), though outlying suburban and rural areas have fewer (e.g., Plant, Natsoulis, and Slootjes 2020). Across the San Francisco region, there have long been and continue to be many active immigrant rights coalitions, focused on specific issues such as naturalization, deportation defense, unaccompanied minors, and policy advocacy at different levels of government.⁴ The local politics are much more integrative than in the Houston metro region. The vast majority of San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose voters have supported Democratic candidates in recent presidential elections, and most, if not all, local government officials have publicly declared support for immigrants. Since the late 1980s, for example, San Francisco officials have enacted several laws addressing language access, labor, health care, identification, and legal and due process rights for immigrants.⁵ The San Francisco region is also situated in what today could be considered the most immigrant-friendly U.S. state, which offers notable rights and protections also to undocumented immigrants (Colbern and Ramakrishnan 2020). San Francisco, Santa Clara County (which includes San Jose), and the state of California all allocated funding towards DACA's implementation.

The New York City metro region has a dense and well-developed infrastructure of civil society organizations similar to the San Francisco metro region. While there are many immigrant organizations in New York City, they are unevenly distributed, with few in Staten Island and the Bronx; there are also few immigrant organizations in outlying suburban and rural areas such as Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island (de Graauw, Gordon, and Mollenkopf 2016). In terms of immigrant rights coalitions, the New York Immigration Coalition has long dominated the political scene, especially in New York City. Created in 1987, the 200+ member organization strong coalition is a powerful advocacy voice in local and state policymaking (Dodge, Ospina, and Sparrow 2004). The majority of voters in New York City have supported Democratic candidates in recent presidential elections, with the exception of Staten Island. Outlying suburban and rural counties are more politically divided, with Nassau County voters leaning Democrat and those in Suffolk County leaning Republican. New York City's immigrant-friendly government has long supported immigrant communities, including with language access legislation, a municipal ID card program, a universal health care access program, and noncitizen voting rights (de Graauw 2021).⁶ In outlying areas, support for immigrant rights has been more muted or simply absent, such as in Suffolk County in the early 2000s when nativist sentiment dominated local politics. The New York City region is situated in an overall immigrant-friendly state (Pham and Van 2014), which offers

some key benefits also to undocumented immigrants, including access to a state driver's license (Smith et al. 2021). New York City also made significant funding available for DACA implementation, while New York State made a much smaller allocation.

Empirical Approach: Interviews with Local Foundation Leaders

Between 2015 and 2019, we interviewed the leaders (i.e., program officers, presidents, or executive directors) of 25 local foundations across these three metro regions (see Appendix). With nine respondents, we had one or two follow-up conversations one year or more years after the initial interview, for 35 interviews total. These 25 local foundations are all focused on supporting and funding projects in a specific geographic area, such as a neighborhood, city, county, or region. None are exclusively focused on immigration or immigrant issues, but they all made the decision to invest, in one way or another, in local organizations involved with promoting DACA's implementation. They include private foundations, community foundations, and donor-advised funds managed by public charities. While all classified as 501(c)(3) organizations, they differ in their funding sources, the level of public involvement in their activities, and IRS restrictions placed on them (Anheier and Hammack 2010). In this paper, we analyze how the civic and political contexts of a place shape whether and how much local foundations invest in pro-immigrant organizations, what they invest in, and the strategies they use for developing relationships with grantees and other funders. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze differences in DACA support across foundation types within one metropolitan region or across regions, though some distinctions do predictably emerge depending on a foundation's mission and funding targets.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours, and they were conducted largely in person and in English. Interview questions addressed a foundation's origins and changes over time, mission and vision, funding areas and funding process, funding specifically for DACA and other immigrant issues, board composition and leadership dynamics, and relationships with grantees, other funders, and government officials. All interviews except four were audio recorded and fully transcribed; for the interviews we did not record, we took extensive notes during and directly after the interview. We analyzed the transcripts and our interview notes through an iterative process of inductive and deductive theorizing, based on multiple rounds of identifying categories and themes, and coding and sorting the data using the software program ATLAS.ti. We use the foundations' real names (as this information is largely public), though we do not identify foundation leaders by name.

Findings

Foundations and DACA in the Greater Houston Area

In the early 20th century, the Houston region's philanthropic sector largely focused on assisting poor Whites (Henthorn 2018), but today it has a diverse ecosystem of about 2,800 foundations (CauseIQ 2023a), including a few focused also on immigrant communities. In early 2013, two foundations took the lead investing in and coordinating a local response to DACA. One was the Houston Endowment, a large private foundation established in 1937 by Jesse Jones, an entrepreneur who made his fortune in banking, real estate, and construction. The second was the Simmons Foundation, a small private foundation created in 1993 with a focus on empowering marginalized communities. With more than \$2 billion in assets, the Houston Endowment annually grants about \$80 million to organizations in the Houston metro region to enhance arts and parks, increase civic engagement, and strengthen public education (Houston Endowment 2024). The Simmons Foundation annually grants about \$3 million to organizations in the Texas Gulf Coast region focused on health, education, civic and community engagement, and human services.⁷ When DACA took effect in August 2012, neither foundation had immigration or immigrant rights as a stated focus area, though both had supported immigrant-serving organizations through other funding portfolios. "If [as a foundation] you're funding anything in this city," a Simmons Foundation employee commented while reflecting on the region's demography, "you're lying to yourself if you think you're not funding undocumented individuals or immigrants."⁸

In early 2013, at a grantor-grantee dialogue on immigration organized by the United Way of Greater Houston in conjunction with GCIR, the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation learned of the acute need for expanded immigration legal services in Houston, especially if comprehensive immigration reform should finally come to pass. "I still remember that the head of Catholic Charities stood up during that meeting," a Houston Endowment employee recounted, "and said that comprehensive immigration reform would have a tsunami effect in our community, because right now, without any formal legislation, legal services providers were able to meet the needs of only 20% of the people coming in for immigration services."⁹ While local nonprofit organizations had long known of the looming crisis in immigration legal services in the Houston region, which has a sparse infrastructure of civil society organizations and one of the weakest access to justice infrastructures across the largest U.S. metropolitan areas (Kerwin and Millet 2022), this stunning information catalyzed the Houston Endowment and the Simmons

Foundation to collaborative action. Inspired by DACA and the hopes of comprehensive immigration reform down the line, and following several more informal conversations with local legal services providers, the two foundations decided to invest in expanding and coordinating immigration legal services capacity in the region.

They proceeded in a deliberative and intentional way. In 2013, they first invested a modest \$175,000 (\$150,000 from the Houston Endowment and \$25,000 from the Simmons Foundation) to set up the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative (HILSC). HILSC, which still exists as of 2024, brought together local legal services providers and university law clinics working with immigrant communities in Houston—notably Catholic Charities, Tahirih Justice Center, Boat People SOS, YMCA International Services, BakerRipley, Kids in Need of Defense, Memorial Assistance Ministries, South Texas College of Law, and the University of Houston Law Center Immigration Clinic. Together, they created a coordinated network of providers to assist low-income immigrants in the region in accessing quality information and legal services. HILSC used the initial foundation funding to hire two part-time staff, including one with “a lot of experience with disaster preparedness.”¹⁰ They were assigned to coordinate meetings between funders and legal services providers and to facilitate a 20-month, multi-stakeholder process to produce a Community Plan that would guide the work of HILSC moving forward (HILSC 2015). During the community planning stage, HILSC also commissioned the Migration Policy Institute—a nonpartisan, DC-based think tank focused on immigration issues—to produce a report on Houston’s diverse immigrant population that delineates the scope of immigration legal services needed in the Houston region (Capps and Soto 2018).

HILSC also used the initial \$175,000 grant to commission services from the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), a national organization focused on expanding affordable and quality legal representation to immigrants, especially in rural and suburban areas. CLINIC trained 100 local non-attorney nonprofit employees for accreditation by the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), enabling them to represent immigrants before U.S. immigration authorities. It also assisted six local nonprofits in gaining official recognition from the BIA, a strategy long used by advocates to multiply the limited supply of legal advocacy resources by relying on paralegal experts working under a supervising attorney. At the time, there were only 23 BIA-accredited individuals in Houston, reflecting the Houston metro region’s insufficient legal capacity.¹¹ The HILSC initiative thus led to a significant and rapid increase in available trained personnel, which was crucial because hiring expensive immigration lawyers was just an impractical

solution to Houston's enormous legal services gap.¹² Expanding the number of BIA-accredited representatives, one HILSC coordinator explained, was also a "way to empower immigrant women of color, because it's a mechanism for a much wider variety of people to be able to practice immigration law without having to go to law school."¹³

In 2014, after the Community Plan had been drafted and the funder-initiated collaborative had been formalized with a democratic governing structure that included local foundations and legal services providers, the Houston Endowment allocated \$1.2 million to HILSC.¹⁴ This funding, released by using an unprecedented fast-track funding process typically reserved for major disaster relief, would initiate three pillars of action articulated in the Community Plan that HILSC members had collaboratively created earlier that year: 1) enable legal services providers to expand capacity, 2) streamline immigrant access to existing legal services, and 3) improve communications between immigration stakeholders throughout the Houston region. Through an innovative participatory grant-making process, legal services provider representatives on HILSC's Executive Committee vetted the applications from fellow providers and allocated funding accordingly. Ultimately, 14 local organizations received funding to help eligible immigrants apply for DACA and conduct outreach regarding the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. The DAPA program, proposed by the Obama administration in late 2014, sought to provide relief to an additional 4.5 million undocumented parents of U.S. citizen and green-card-holding children. DAPA faced swift and decisive legal challenges and was never implemented. Nonetheless, the hopeful period before DAPA evaporated in early 2015 motivated foundations and legal services providers in the Houston region to help prepare immigrants for the possibility that additional relief could be on the horizon.

In 2015, even when the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation had trouble engaging other local funders in their new immigrant justice work, they successfully attracted about \$380,000 in matching funds from the Ford and Open Society Foundations to continue their capacity-building work through HILSC.¹⁵ These national matching dollars were part of the Delivering on the Dream (DOTD) Project, a funder collaboration network initiated by GCIR in 2012 to protect and defend the rights of immigrants and refugees nationwide. HILSC benefitted from national matching funding until 2022 when the DOTD sunset due to a decrease in available national funding (de Chinchilla 2023). This DOTD funding along with continued funding from the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation have allowed HILSC to expand holistic immigration legal services in the Houston area, even throughout the COVID pandemic. This

support has benefitted a range of immigrants, including undocumented immigrants in detention, asylum seekers, and immigrants impacted by natural disasters and public health crises (HILSC 2020, 2021). In allocating this funding to local organizations, HILSC has maintained a collaborative approach, encouraging partnership grant applications and involving also other local foundations as grant application reviewers. The George Foundation, a place-based funder in Fort Bend County just southwest of Houston, served as a reviewer, an experience that offered its “all-White, politically really conservative” board of trustees an opportunity to be educated on immigration issues.¹⁶

HILSC, according to a long-time Texas Access to Justice Foundation employee, helped create “deeper trust” between local foundations and the 14 to 27 organizations whose work HILSC funds annually.¹⁷ HILSC, he added, also motivated legal services providers to “[think] of themselves as a community . . . with people assigning roles based on their strengths and not just based on dollars.”¹⁸ A Simmons Foundation employee similarly reflected that because of HILSC, there is now “more collaboration and less competition among different legal services providers” to identify and address service gaps and find solutions to systemic shortcomings in the provision of immigration legal services in the Houston region.¹⁹ Due to HILSC, services providers have built more capacity to help immigrants, notably in the region’s urban core but also in Houston’s outlying areas. In 2015, for example, Catholic Charities was able to open a legal services clinic in Fort Bend County, an immigrant-dense swing county that often leans Republican and that previously had no immigration legal services providers. The Houston Endowment even successfully garnered support from the newly-engaged George Foundation, which had little prior “technical expertise around immigration legal services issues,” to support aspects of this new clinic.²⁰

The investments of these two local foundations has helped sustain this democratically-run collaborative focused on increasing legal service capacity and creating better collaboration and coordination among existing services providers. This trajectory is partly the product of Houston’s civic and political contexts. In the absence of an existing immigrant rights coalition with the capacity and interest to take on DACA-related services and advocacy, there was a need for a new regional collaborative that could pull together a coordinated response to DACA. While the enormous need for immigration legal services would warrant a greater number of providers, the immediacy of DACA—with just two months between program announcement and launch—made it prudent for foundations not to focus on investing in new organizations, which need “more hand-holding and mentorship” according to one foundation employee, but rather expanding and

streamlining the capacity of existing ones.²¹ As a result, the greatest expansion in capacity has been among organizations in the region's urban core, given the scarcity of organizations in outlying areas for foundations to invest in. "Galveston has no legal services," a Houston Endowment employee noted, "Fort Bend County has no immigration legal services. West Katy has no immigration legal services . . . but we have local funders that said if there's a local project, they'd be willing to review it [for possible investment]." ²² These dynamics help explain why only the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation, local funders with portfolios focused also on organizations in the city of Houston, have continuously invested in HILSC.

The region's political context also explains foundations' leading role in funding and coordinating a local response to DACA in the Houston region. The absence of local (and state) government funding for DACA's implementation left a leadership vacuum that the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation boldly stepped into. One issue the new partnership had to tackle was the stigma directed at undocumented immigrants in this overall conservative area. "A big issue, especially with DAPA," a Houston Endowment employee commented, "was the local politics of allowing adult individuals who knowingly entered this country illegally to get some kind of legal status."²³ She added, "It's really hard for the mayor to get support from city council members to fund the implementation of these programs, even among Democrats, who tend to be on the more conservative side in Texas."²⁴ Republican leaders also framed their resistance to promoting DACA and DAPA as a critique of presidential overreach and a defense of local rule, an argument central to the Texas-led lawsuits against both programs. "[Houston's] city council might have been supportive of [DACA and DAPA]," one HILSC coordinator commented, "if they had gone through the proper legislative procedure, had they not been created by executive action."²⁵ The controversial local and state politics of undocumented immigration also made it difficult for the Houston Endowment and the Simmons Foundation to involve other local funders in HILSC. "Unfortunately, Texas is a conservative state," a Houston Endowment employee noted, "and it's a lot more work to get foundations involved in directly funding immigration."²⁶

Foundations and DACA in the San Francisco Bay Area

Distinct from Houston, the San Francisco Bay Area offers a denser civic context and a more left-leaning political context for foundation engagement with DACA. With over 3,100 foundations (CauseIQ 2023b), the Bay Area not only has more foundations overall than the Houston region, but also more foundations with immigrant rights as a stated focus area that pre-dates DACA. The

San Francisco Foundation—a large community foundation with an endowment of \$1.7 billion that serves San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, Contra Costa, and San Mateo Counties has supported immigrant integration since the mid-1980s and has had a stand-alone Immigrant Integration Fund since 2011.²⁷ The Grove Foundation—a family foundation that focuses its \$15 million annual grants budget on San Mateo County just south of San Francisco as well as the larger Bay Area—set up a separate immigration program following federal immigration raids in cities across the Bay Area in 2006-2007.²⁸ Similarly, the Zellerbach Family Foundation (which funds efforts across the Bay Area), the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund (which funds mostly in the Bay Area, but also elsewhere in California), and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (which funds across the Bay Area and is the nation's largest community foundation) all have had immigrant rights and integration programs that pre-date DACA.²⁹ For other foundations, including the Community Foundation Sonoma County and the Napa County Community Foundation (which, as their names suggest, fund only in these two counties located north of San Francisco), immigration became a focus area only around the time of DACA's creation.³⁰

Compared to the Houston region, the Bay Area has a denser and more developed infrastructure of immigrant-focused civil society organizations (de Graauw 2016; Gleeson 2012) and a stronger access to justice infrastructure of legal services providers (Kerwin and Millet 2022). Across the Bay Area, legal services providers and immigrant rights organizations have long been, and continue to be, very well organized in coalitions that coordinate service delivery and outreach to immigrant communities, as well as policy advocacy at the local level and beyond. Earlier foundation-funded coalitions operated region-wide, including the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights (established in 1987 to promote the implementation of IRCA) and the Northern California Citizenship Project (created in 1997 to help naturalize immigrants after the passage of 1996 federal welfare reform legislation).³¹ More recently, with the advent of social media and growing wealth polarization across Bay Area communities, one Zellerbach Family Foundation employee noted, organizations have instead “self-organized and established smaller county coalitions.”³² Another San Francisco Foundation employee explained that 12 smaller immigration-focused collaboratives were once active across the Bay Area pre-DACA, many organized around specific issues such as naturalization, deportation defense, and policy advocacy at different levels of government.³³ Reflecting on this coalitional fragmentation, she mused, “I don't know that one umbrella coalition that was legal services and advocacy and organizing [like there used to be in the 1980s and 1990s] could really survive today.”³⁴

The Bay Area's well-developed infrastructure of immigrant-focused organizations and coalitions offers many investment options to foundations that want to support the immigrant justice movement. Yet, it also comes with challenges, especially for foundations that fund across the Bay Area. "The numerous collaboratives, with many overlapping across the region and across the issues," one San Francisco Foundation employee noted, "[makes it] very time consuming" for her foundation to engage with them.³⁵ Similarly, one Grove Foundation employee explained how many immigration-focused coalitions across the Bay Area, with advocates often part of more than one coalition, creates enough fragmentation "that it does get kind of messy."³⁶ So many coalitions, the same employee of the San Francisco Foundation noted, "[made] it hard when I was dealing with \$500,000 [in grant funding] to figure out" how to distribute it.³⁷ She wondered whether it was better to fund specific organizations or instead an entire coalition, and whether to offer program-specific or instead more flexible general operating support.

Beyond the third sector, local and state government have also invested in immigrant rights and DACA. Notably, in 2012, San Francisco officials created the DreamSF Program, which provides over \$350,000 in annual grants to local organizations to support outreach, education, and legal services to youth eligible for DACA (SFOM 2014a). In 2014, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee announced \$500,000 in new funding to help implement DACA and DAPA, and in 2015, he announced \$10 million in total budget funding over two years to support immigrant communities in San Francisco by opening a new labor center for immigrants, supporting citizenship acquisition, and promoting the implementation of DACA and broader immigration administrative relief programs (SFOM 2014b, 2015). Similarly, in 2015, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved \$1.8 million towards implementation of DACA and DAPA (SCCBOS 2015).³⁸ The state of California also invested in DACA. In 2015, with an initial allocation of \$15 million and additional funding in subsequent years, state officials created the One California Immigration Services Funding program to support nonprofit organizations in providing education, outreach, and an array of immigration legal services, including to individuals applying for DACA (CIPC no date).

In these relatively more immigrant-supportive civic and political contexts, Bay Area foundation investment in DACA took two forms. First, foundations that had already been funding local organizations to provide integration and legal services (e.g., to provide citizenship or deportation defense services), continued funding these organizations so they could expand legal services capacity, enabling them to work on multiple fronts, including on DACA implementation. This approach helped maintain one-on-one relations between grantor and grantee. At times,

additional funding was allocated; at other times, foundations allowed organizations to pivot existing grants to work on DACA outreach or legal services. “We were already deep in immigrant integration,” one San Francisco Foundation employee commented, “so we don’t have a large [DACA] grant strategy . . . we continued to fund individual organizations with largely core operating grants, because then that would give them the flexibility to work on the issues.”³⁹ The WKF Giving Fund, a small family giving fund created in 2010, extended its work in Bay Area rural communities for organizations to also provide job training and other educational opportunities that would enable more undocumented youth to qualify for DACA.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Zellerbach Family Foundation and the Grove Foundation continued funding many prior grantees directly, allowing them to work on DACA as well as other immigrant rights issues.⁴¹

Second, via the leadership of the Grove Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation, a new regional DACA collaborative was created: the Bay Area DACA Collaborative (BADACA). BADACA, which was active for 2.5 years between 2012 and 2015, convened a total of 25 legal services providers and educational organizations from across 10 Bay Area counties and drew on financial support from 13 local foundations and additional national foundations’ matching grants. The goal of BADACA was to maximize DACA-related service delivery capacity for existing legal services providers for the estimated 60,000 DACA-eligible youth residing in the Bay Area (IIBA 2015). During its existence, BADACA raised more than \$1.7 million, funds that were re-granted through the International Institute of the Bay Area (BADACA’s lead agency) to legal services providers throughout the Bay Area. In 2015, BADACA would transform into Ready Bay Area, a similar collaborative with an expanded focus on broader immigration administrative relief programs, now coordinated by the San Francisco-based Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

BADACA offered a centralized mechanism for local foundations that were already funding the immigrant justice movement to engage new local foundations and raise more resources for DACA implementation, thereby expanding the types of foundations supporting the immigrant justice movement. Given that DACA benefits undocumented youth, the focus was on drawing in foundations that invest in education and youth development issues. “BADACA’s done an excellent job of expanding funders,” one Haas, Jr. Fund employee commented, “bringing the Heising-Simons Foundation, an education funder, into this.”⁴² BADACA also managed to involve the S.H. Cowell Foundation, a San Francisco-based foundation that invests broadly in families, youth, and education. While the S.H. Cowell Foundation contributed only a modest \$25,000 to BADACA, the Heising-Simons Foundation contributed \$220,000, making it the second largest local funder of

BADACA, behind the Grove Foundation's contribution of \$272,000 (IIBA 2015). BADACA also put Bay Area foundations in a better position to attract matching dollars from national foundations as part of the DOTD Project. In fact, BADACA was the first collaborative to receive DOTD funding, one GCIR employee commented, because "there was an established configuration of funders focused on immigration issues . . . they were the first collaborative out of the gate."⁴³ BADACA received just over \$317,000 from national funders (IIBA 2015).

BADACA provided a much needed coordination mechanism in a region replete with immigrant-focused, county-level collaboratives with overlapping grantees and funders. The International Institute of the Bay Area set up regular meetings with all the organizations receiving funding through the collaborative. These meetings helped to better coordinate existing DACA legal services and outreach to immigrant communities across the Bay Area, while enabling organizations to share best practices and technical assistance and minimizing duplication of efforts across DACA- and non-DACA-focused collaboratives in different Bay Area counties. "[Many organizations and collaboratives across the Bay Area] started out focusing on naturalization," one WKF Giving Fund employee mentioned, "and then DACA became the big issue . . . and the same folks that are doing naturalization are doing DACA . . . and then on top of that the [unaccompanied] minors issue raised its head."⁴⁴ BADACA, and later Ready Bay Area, she added, "[helped] to attract resources and standards and share expertise and to be able to have a sense of what can be accomplished and how many people can be served" in a situation where legal services providers had on many hats via an array of local collaboratives focused on various immigration issues.⁴⁵

BADACA arguably promoted a more equitable distribution of DACA funding across the Bay Area, prioritizing areas that needed funding the most because foundations and local governments had not previously invested in them. Rural areas especially experienced a lift because of BADACA. Sonoma, Solano, and Napa Counties, one Grove Foundation employee noted, have "no deep funders" when it comes to immigration issues, and local governments—which are more conservative than in the region's urban core—have not invested in immigrant rights either.⁴⁶ They also have a more challenging DACA caseload, she added, that disproportionately includes immigrants who "are afraid to come forward because they're not meeting educational requirements" and who need more coaching to get ready to apply for DACA.⁴⁷ By joining BADACA, rural counties could share in national matching funding secured through the DOTD Project. "Napa County couldn't compete [for DOTD funding]," one Haas, Jr. Fund employee

commented, “if it went by itself.”⁴⁸ Also, while funders had agreed to distribute BADACA funding across the 10 participating counties on a per capita basis of DACA-eligible individuals, the same Grove Foundation employee explained, “we overallocated to rural places . . . we wanted some of the rural places to get more.”⁴⁹ With the goal of achieving a more equitable regional distribution of DACA resources, according to a Zellerbach Family Foundation employee, funders also decided not to give San Francisco “any money through the collaborative” outside of the government funding and one-on-one foundation grants that local organizations were already receiving.⁵⁰

To summarize, local foundations in the San Francisco Bay Area continued to make legal services grants to individual organizations they had previously funded, but they also funded a new regional collaborative that expanded the types of foundations supporting DACA implementation and that helped to distribute foundation resources more equitably across the region, to the benefit of organizations serving outlying rural areas. Foundations left it up to existing county coalitions to decide how to distribute the allocated funding among BADACA member organizations. While some counties divided the BADACA funding based on the size and capacity of individual organizations, one Zellerbach Family Foundation employee noted, “in Santa Clara County, every organization got exactly the same amount of money regardless of its size and what it was capable of doing.”⁵¹ While this arrangement minimized foundation interference in county coalitional relations, the same respondent noted, it made “quality control a little confusing . . . we didn’t have consistent tracking [of DACA outcomes].”⁵² Ultimately, unlike in Houston, foundations in the San Francisco Bay Area took a more hands-off approach in deciding how foundation dollars were distributed, deferring to local coalitions’ assessments of need.

Foundations and DACA in the New York City Metro Area

In contrast to both the Houston region and the San Francisco Bay Area, the New York City Metro Area offers yet another philanthropic funding model. With about 17,000 foundations (CauseIQ 2023c), the New York City metro region has far more foundations than the Houston and San Francisco regions combined. Among them are many foundations that while based in the region do not invest in it, instead making grants nationally or internationally. One employee of the Daphne Foundation—a small foundation created in 1991 with a focus on empowering marginalized communities in New York City—characterized the New York City region as consisting of “a diverse and complex ecosystem of philanthropic dollars with both super local foundations like Daphne and foundations that are entirely national or international.”⁵³ For example, the New York

City-based Ford Foundation—created in 1936 by the son of car manufacturer Henry Ford and today one of the largest foundations in the United States—has led philanthropic support for the immigrant justice movement since the 1980s (Sullivan and Shorr 2021). For a long time, however, Ford focused on funding grantees across the United States advocating for federal immigration reform; only recently has Ford invested in immigrant organizations locally.

The New York City region, however, has many local foundations—both large and small—that have supported the immigrant justice movement, even pre-DACA. The New York Community Trust (NYCT)—which serves as the community foundation for the five boroughs of New York City with \$3 billion in assets and managing over 2,000 funds—is one of the largest community foundations in the United States and has long invested in immigrant communities in New York City. After passage of IRCA in 1986, the NYCT created the Fund for New Citizens, “the grandmother of all immigration funds”⁵⁴ according to one GCIR employee, to make grants in New York City to strengthen immigrant-led organizations, challenge punitive immigration laws, promote pro-immigrant policies at the state and local levels, foster coalitions of immigration advocates, and support partnerships with legal services providers. The Robin Hood Foundation, a large poverty-fighting foundation with more than \$350 million in assets, has long invested in legal services, access to health care, and workforce development for immigrant New Yorkers.⁵⁵ Beyond Daphne, other smaller foundations also focus on funding immigrant-led advocacy and immigrant civic engagement in the region, including the Scherman Foundation (which also funds in New York City), the Brooklyn Community Foundation (which funds in Brooklyn), and the Hagedorn Foundation (which funded organizations on Long Island between 2005 and 2017).⁵⁶

Like the San Francisco Bay Area, the New York City Metro Area has a dense and well developed infrastructure of immigrant-focused civil society organizations (Cordero-Guzmán 2005; MOIA 2007) and one of the strongest access to justice infrastructures across the largest U.S. metropolitan areas (Kerwin and Millet 2022). Across the New York City region, legal services providers and immigrant rights organizations have long collaborated on service delivery, immigrant organizing, and policy advocacy. However, collaborations have been much more centralized in New York City than in the Bay Area, and the state-wide New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) has long dominated the scene. Established in 1987 with seed funding from the NYCT, the NYIC is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization with 65 full- and part-time staff and a membership of over 200 immigrant and refugee organizations. It is the leading voice for newcomers downstate and upstate, as well as a leader in national immigration advocacy efforts.

Local foundations have collaborated as well. Notably, they have coordinated their pro-immigrant funding through the Fund for New Citizens, often with a focus on immigration legal services, including for DACA. For over 25 years, local foundations have also pooled resources through the New York City Capacity Building Collaborative to build the capacity of newer grassroots organizations, many focused on immigrant communities.⁵⁷

As in the San Francisco Bay Area, local and state government have also invested in immigrant rights and DACA in the New York City region. In an unprecedented move, in 2013, the New York City Council allocated \$18 million for DACA implementation to the city's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the City University of New York. Most of this two-year funding was used to broaden educational pathways for DACA-eligible immigrants by creating 6,000 additional adult education class slots in New York City. The rest of the funding was used to fund legal services through established providers, to help applicants pay for the DACA application fee, and to support a range of community-based organizations to conduct outreach about DACA (DYCD 2013). In 2015, this legal services support for undocumented immigrants was rolled into a much larger, multi-million dollar citywide immigration legal services initiative called ActionNYC, which was run as a partnership between the city's Human Resources Administration and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and implemented by local nonprofit organizations. ActionNYC aimed to provide immigrant New Yorkers with free comprehensive immigration legal services in the neighborhoods where they live and in the languages that they speak. On a smaller scale, in 2013, the New York State Department of Education allocated \$1 million for DACA implementation. Spread over two years, this funding provided education services and support for DACA-eligible out-of-school youth and young adults in New York State.

With much of city and state funding for DACA implementation available early on, foundations in the New York City region invested in DACA in ways that complemented these public supports. The NYCT, one if its employees commented, used \$400,000 of its emergency funds via "emergency grant making procedures used for the first time since September 11, 2001, to make early grants to both community groups and legal services providers to do outreach and provide legal help."⁵⁸ They acted fast and ahead of the release of city and state funding, the same respondent noted, and "we got grant letters out the day after [DACA] applications opened in August [2012]."⁵⁹ The NYCT made additional DACA implementation investments in early 2013 tapping funding it had raised through the Fund for New Citizens, so that they "put out around \$1 million in the first 15 months of the DACA program."⁶⁰ By late 2013, when the city and state

funding for DACA was made available, the NYCT pivoted its legal services funding to help where these public resources could not. This included supporting undocumented immigrants facing deportation, for whom no publicly-funded legal representation was available at the time. Similarly, NYCT decided not to fund organizations that assisted with DACA renewal applications, the same respondent noted, because “it was my understanding that DACA grants from DYCD could fund renewals.”⁶¹ In all, the availability of public funding shaped how private funders allocated resources and collaborated with each other.

The Robin Hood Foundation had also been funding immigration legal services pre-DACA. “We didn’t do anything specifically after the announcement of DACA,” one Robin Hood Foundation employee commented, instead allowing its grantees to “repurpose existing immigration legal services contracts to address DACA.”⁶² The Robin Hood Foundation had already been working with legal practitioners and immigrant rights advocates on incubating the Immigrant Justice Corps (IJC), a “big fellowship program for immigration attorneys” to address “the critical shortage of attorneys in New York City’s nonprofit infrastructure.”⁶³ Launched in January 2014 with an initial grant of \$1.3 million from the Robin Hood Foundation, the same respondent explained, the IJC every year “recruits 25 of the top graduates from law schools across the country and places them in local nonprofits in New York City to do immigration casework.”⁶⁴ Besides these Justice Fellows, the IJC annually also recruits 20 Community Fellows, who are recent college graduates trained to “essentially [be] BIA-accredited reps doing outreach and [immigration legal] screenings in nontraditional locations where we think immigrants might be accessing services.”⁶⁵ In light of city funding for *existing* legal services providers in New York City, the Robin Hood Foundation focused its grant-making on the *expansion* of the immigration legal services field with new young attorneys and BIA-accredited representatives. Now as an independent 501(c)(3) organization, the IJC continues to receive annual grants from the Robin Hood Foundation.

With city and state DACA legal services funding going mostly to established providers, other foundations in the New York City region focused on incubating and cultivating new organizations engaged in work beyond legal services or those not yet ready to compete for city contracts. Several funders noted that a healthy ecosystem of immigrant organizations includes those doing legal services, advocacy, and organizing.⁶⁶ “New York City grants were funding a lot around DACA legal services,” one Brooklyn Community Foundation employee commented.⁶⁷ To avoid duplication of what was already being supported, the Brooklyn Community Foundation

decided to focus on “youth development, funding particularly youth organizing, and also funding the leadership of immigrant youth,” also by annually incubating several small organizations.⁶⁸ Similarly, the New York Foundation, which supports community organizing and grassroots advocacy in New York City, annually funds about a dozen new organizations with multi-year grants. These grants provide minimal support for organizational overhead and builds in significant organizational mentorship. “We’re known in the field as a supporter of startup organizations,” one New York Foundation employee noted.⁶⁹ Among them are many organizations led by and serving immigrant workers and immigrant youth, especially in parts of New York City with a “deficit in immigrant organizations, like southeast Queens and Staten Island.”⁷⁰ Similarly, the NYCT has reserved some of its legal services funding for organizations that “have not had the capacity to deal with the really demanding city contracts [for DACA and immigration legal services].”⁷¹ These include many groups serving the growing South Asian immigrant community.

Unlike in the Houston region (where there was no regional immigration coalition or collaborative pre-DACA) and the San Francisco Bay Area (which was replete with county-level immigration coalitions across the region), foundations in the New York City region did not invest in a new DACA collaborative. The NYCT’s Fund for New Citizens already enabled local foundations to collaborate and pool funding to support organizations serving immigrant New Yorkers. Since its creation in 1987, the Fund “has enjoyed the support of 33 foundations and has made almost \$27 million in grants to community groups and legal service organizations that support immigrants” (Morehead 2017). Heavy investment from New York City in DACA support and other immigration legal services also dissuaded the creation of a funder-driven DACA collaborative in New York City. Coordination tasks instead naturally gravitated to the city agencies that managed and dispersed this funding—initially DYCD and later the Human Resources Administration and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. Further, the NYIC, long a coordinating force among immigrant and refugee organizations in the region—created the New York Immigrant Assistance Consortium to, according to a NYCT employee, “offer coordination among CBOs and legal services providers.”⁷² Ultimately, the region’s political and civic contexts made it unnecessary to focus foundation investment in a new DACA collaborative.

Conclusions

This paper has provided three profiles of approaches to philanthropic funding in response to federal immigration policy changes, underscoring the importance of a localized assessment of foundation

behavior in the immigrant rights space. In all three metropolitan regions we studied, local foundations invested in implementing DACA, and in doing so, also supported organizations at the forefront of the immigrant justice movement. In each case, funders built out organizational capacity around DACA, while also offering other legal services, including those related to naturalization, deportation defense, and representation to unaccompanied minors. Foundation funding directed at DACA also allowed immigrant-focused organizations to conduct outreach in hard-to-reach immigrant communities, to help applicants pay the DACA application fee, and to provide job training and other educational opportunities enabling more undocumented youth to qualify for and ultimately apply for DACA.

While national foundations, including the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations, also invested in DACA, local foundations provided a more consistent stream of funding that helped strengthen the spine of the grassroots-led immigrant justice movement. “The national funders,” one employee of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund noted, “have larger sums of money, but they are more fickle . . . they invest, and then pshhh, pshhh, they’re gone! I really believe that sustainability [of the immigrant justice movement] rests with local funders.”⁷³ National funders can infuse much needed immigrant justice capital into a region, one GCIR employee also noted, but local foundations are the ones to sustain it.⁷⁴

Cross-regionally, however, we observed variation in how many local foundations invested in DACA, as well as what they invested in and the types of partnerships they built. This variation can be explained in large part by differences in the regions’ civic and political contexts. The Greater Houston Area has a thin infrastructure of immigrant organizations, no regional immigration coalition pre-DACA, and no local or state government funding for DACA implementation. Here, two local foundations took the lead in funding and erecting a collaborative premised on democratic decision making, focused on increasing legal service capacity and creating better collaboration and coordination among established services providers, especially those located in the region’s urban core. By contrast, the San Francisco Bay Area has a well-developed infrastructure of immigrant organizations, many county-level immigrant rights coalitions that predate DACA, and both local and state government invested heavily in DACA implementation. In the San Francisco Bay Area, a larger number and larger variety of foundations—including education and youth development funders—supported organizations they had previously funded for other immigrant rights work, thereby maintaining one-on-one grantor-grantee relations. They also invested in a new regional DACA collaborative in an attempt to ameliorate the Bay Area’s

coalitional fragmentation and to help ensure that also outlying areas received the DACA resources they desperately needed. Finally, the New York City Metro Area also has a developed and thick infrastructure of immigrant organizations, a dominant immigrant rights coalition that predates DACA, and significant city funding and more modest state government support for DACA implementation. In the New York City region, a large number of local foundations collectively invested in a greater variety of DACA supports that complemented what city funding supported, including continued legal services grants to established immigrant-serving organizations, a new fellowship program for immigration attorneys, and the incubation of new organizations intended to help maintain a broader ecosystem of immigrant organizations. Because coordination of DACA implementation was already provided by city agencies issuing DACA contracts, the NYIC, and the New Citizens Fund, local foundations did not invest in a new regional DACA collaborative that might have otherwise pushed resources further out to outlying rural and suburban areas.

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Appendix: Foundations Interviewed, 2015-2019

Greater Houston Area (Texas)

1. George Foundation
2. Houston Endowment*
3. Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative*
4. Rockwell Fund
5. Simmons Foundation*
6. Texas Access to Justice Foundation

San Francisco Bay Area (California)

1. Community Foundation Sonoma County
2. Emerson Collective
3. Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
4. Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees*
5. Grove Foundation*
6. Napa Valley Community Foundation
7. San Francisco Foundation
8. Silicon Valley Community Foundation
9. Sonoma County Winegrowers Foundation
10. WKF Giving Fund*
11. Zellerbach Family Foundation

New York City Metro Area (New York)

1. Brooklyn Community Foundation
2. Daphne Foundation
3. Hagedorn Foundation*
4. JPB Foundation
5. New York Community Trust*
6. New York Foundation
7. Robin Hood Foundation*
8. Scherman Foundation

* = We had one or more follow-up interviews with these foundations.

Notes

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all demographic data are from the American Community Survey, 2018-2022 estimates, detailed table S0501.

² They include *El Concilio Hispano de Organizaciones* (the Hispanic Council of Organizations) that supported amnesty for undocumented immigrants during the 1980s, a local chapter of the state-wide Texas Immigrant Rights Coalition, the direct-action oriented *Houston Unido* (Houston United), the faith-based Houston Coalition for Immigration Reform led by an African-American pastor, and the business-driven Americans for Immigration Reform convened by the local chamber of commerce and several high-profile immigration lawyers.

³ Harris County—the region's most urban county that also includes most of the city of Houston—had a 287(g) agreement between 2008 and 2017, and the more suburban and rural Chambers, Galveston, Matagorda, Montgomery, Waller, and Wharton Counties still have such agreements as of 2024 (ICE 2024).

⁴ They include the San Francisco Immigrant Legal & Education Network (SFILEN), the San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship Collaborative, the San Francisco Immigrant Legal Defense Collaborative (SFILDC), the Interfaith Coalition on Immigrant Rights, Collaborative Resources for Immigrant Services on the Peninsula (CRISP), the South Bay Legal Immigration Services Network (SBLISN), United Coalition for Immigrant Services, the Santa Clara County Citizenship Collaborative, the Social Justice Collaborative, the East Bay Naturalization Collaborative (EBNATZ), the Citizenship Collaborative in the South Bay, the Santa Cruz Area Consortium, Citizenship Legal Services of Napa County, and the New Americans Campaign.

⁵ These include the Sanctuary Ordinance (1989), Living Wage Ordinance (2000), Equal Access to Services Ordinance (2001), Health Care Accountability Ordinance (2001), Minimum Wage Ordinance (Proposition L, 2003), Health Care Security Ordinance (2006), Paid Sick Leave Ordinance (2006), Municipal ID Ordinance (2007), Wage Theft Prevention Ordinance (2011), Due

Process for All Ordinance (2013), and Minimum Wage Increase Ballot Measure (Proposition J, 2014).

⁶ However, the New York City law (Local Law 11) created in 2022 to extend local voting rights to city residents who are legal immigrants in the United States was struck down by the New York Supreme Court later that year, a decision upheld by the state appeals court in 2024 (Coltin 2024; de Graauw 2023).

⁷ Interview with the Simmons Foundation, 3/19/2015.

⁸ Interview with the Simmons Foundation, 3/19/2015.

⁹ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

¹⁰ Interview with the Simmons Foundation, 3/19/2015.

¹¹ Interview with HILSC, 3/13/2015.

¹² Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

¹³ Interview with HILSC, 3/13/2015.

¹⁴ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

¹⁵ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 4/7/2016.

¹⁶ Interview with the George Foundation, 4/15/2016.

¹⁷ Interview with the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, 3/30/2015.

¹⁸ Interview with the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, 3/30/2015.

¹⁹ Interview with the Simmons Foundation, 3/19/2015.

²⁰ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

²¹ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 4/7/2016.

²² Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

²³ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

²⁴ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

²⁵ Interview with HILSC, 3/13/2015.

²⁶ Interview with the Houston Endowment, 3/2/2015.

²⁷ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015.

²⁸ Interview with the Grove Foundation, 5/18/2015.

²⁹ Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015; interview with the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, 6/30/2015; interview with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 4/2/2015.

³⁰ Interview with Sonoma County Community Foundation, 6/29/2015; interview with Napa Valley Community Foundation, 9/15/2016.

³¹ Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015.

³² Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015.

³³ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015. Also see note #4.

³⁴ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015.

³⁵ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015.

³⁶ Interview with the Grove Foundation, 5/18/2015.

³⁷ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015.

³⁸ Interview with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 4/2/2015.

³⁹ Interview with the San Francisco Foundation, 6/29/2015.

⁴⁰ Interview with the WKF Giving Fund, 5/11/2015.

⁴¹ Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015; interview with the Grove Foundation, 5/26/2016.

⁴² Interview with the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, 6/30/2015.

⁴³ Interview with GCIR, 4/17/2015.

⁴⁴ Interview with the WKF Giving Fund, 6/16/2015.

⁴⁵ Interview with the WKF Giving Fund, 6/16/2015.

⁴⁶ Interview the Grove Foundation, 5/18/2015.

⁴⁷ Interview the Grove Foundation, 5/18/2015.

⁴⁸ Interview with the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, 6/30/2015.

⁴⁹ Interview the Grove Foundation, 5/18/2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015.

⁵¹ Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015.

⁵² Interview with the Zellerbach Family Foundation, 6/30/2015.

⁵³ Interview with the Daphne Foundation, 1/15/2019.

⁵⁴ Interview with GCIR, 6/11/2015.

⁵⁵ Interview with the Robin Hood Foundation, 1/15/2019.

⁵⁶ Interview with the Daphne Foundation, 1/15/2019; interview with the Scherman Foundation, 7/25/2018; interview with the Brooklyn Community Foundation, 7/30/2018; interview with the Hagedorn Foundation, 2/27/2015.

⁵⁷ Interview with the Daphne Foundation, 1/15/2019.

⁵⁸ Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁵⁹ Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁶⁰ Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁶¹ Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁶² Interview with the Robin Hood Foundation, 1/26/2015.

⁶³ Interview with the Robin Hood Foundation, 1/26/2015.

⁶⁴ Interview with the Robin Hood Foundation, 1/26/2015.

⁶⁵ Interview with the Robin Hood Foundation, 1/26/2015.

⁶⁶ Interview with the New York Foundation, 1/23/2019; interview with the Scherman Foundation, 7/25/2018; interview with the Brooklyn Community Foundation, 7/30/2018; interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁶⁷ Interview with the Brooklyn Community Foundation, 7/30/2018.

⁶⁸ Interview with the Brooklyn Community Foundation, 7/30/2018.

⁶⁹ Interview with the New York Foundation, 1/23/2019.

⁷⁰ Interview with the New York Foundation, 1/23/2019.

⁷¹ Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁷² Interview with the NYCT, 3/2/2015.

⁷³ Interview with the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, 6/30/2015

⁷⁴ Interview with GCIR, 4/17/2015.