

## May 4, 2007 Immigration Convening: Notes and Proceedings

### Introduction

Early this year, motivated by the belief that the newly-formed Silicon Valley Community Foundation can be relevant in the lives of immigrants, Jaime Alvarado, executive director of the Mayfair Improvement Initiative extended an invitation to Dr. Emmett D. Carson to engage in a dialogue with leaders and advocates from our region's diverse immigrant communities. In collaboration with Teresa Castellanos from the Office of Human Relations, Immigrant Relations and Integration Services at the County of Santa Clara, Jaime and community foundation staff began to design a conversation. At the same time, the community foundation's Community Initiatives, Convening and Research department began planning the Community Input Project. A cornerstone of this project is a series of strategic conversations around important regional issues.

On Friday, May 4, 2007, community foundation staff sponsored an Immigration Convening as part of its Community Input Project, with over 50 immigrant leaders, advocates and funders in attendance. Participants exchanged information and ideas and examined an immigrant integration strategy for our region.

The following notes and proceedings are from this important gathering.

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Eleanor Clement Glass, chief giving officer at Silicon Valley Community Foundation, welcomed everyone to the convening. She stated that this was the first public, strategic conversation around immigration issues. She also recognized key members of the Planning Committee, who had been instrumental in creating the day's event.

Eleanor stated that the community foundation's role at this event was to listen, dialogue with the community and be supportive of issues raised. She shared that the Silicon Valley Community Foundation is a young foundation with multiple ways of making an impact, including grantmaking, convening and initiatives. She concluded by saying this was a convening about learning how we come together in a meaningful way.

Jaime Alvarado also welcomed everyone to the meeting. He shared that the Mayan calendar predicts the end of the world in the year 2013, but that some individuals see this as a time when things can shift. He noted that the day's convening marked a shift in how immigrant leaders, advocates, funders and community foundation representatives can interact with one another.

### 2. Context for the Day

#### 2.1 Why We Are Here

Erica Wood, vice president of community initiatives, convening and research, reviewed the purpose and outcomes for the day, which were to build an understanding of the immigrant integration framework; initiate a relationship-building process between community foundation leadership and immigrant leaders and advocates; and to identify issues and opportunities affecting the immigrant community. Erica then introduced Richard Hobbs.

## 2.2 Overview of Immigration Issues in Our Region

Richard Hobbs, director of the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations, provided important context around immigration issues in the Silicon Valley region. He shared that two out of three individuals in the region are immigrants or children of immigrants; within California, only Los Angeles County and Orange County have greater numbers of immigrants.

Richard stated that important work around immigration in Santa Clara County began with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. This legislation made sweeping changes in immigration law, consequences of crimes for immigrants and access to public benefit programs, such as Food Stamps and Social Security Insurance (SSI).

In the year 2000, a Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions was held, marking the culmination of an 18-month process of analyzing the needs of the largest and neediest 16 immigrant groups in Santa Clara County. The findings and recommendations from the summit were published in a 400-page final report entitled *Bridging Borders in Silicon Valley*.

As a result of the summit, a series of important actions were taken, including the creation of citizenship programs (which helped over 100,000 legal immigrants become citizens), improved legal services and civic engagement opportunities. The County's Office of the Public Defender created a special position to work with other public defenders in helping them understand the immigration consequences from criminal convictions as well as misdemeanors and minor infractions. San Jose State University also created a program to help senior immigrants through the naturalization process.

Finally, Richard noted some of the challenges, which included the unmet needs of immigrants. Currently, there are 120,000 undocumented immigrants in Santa Clara County, with no work authorization or safety net. He also noted that comprehensive immigration reform is on the federal government's agenda this year and that there are important opportunities for advocacy. He also talked about the Immigration Cultural Proficiency Initiative, which has as its goal the ability to collect data on an individual's country of origin as well as language preference to ensure that services are culturally sensitive and relevant. He concluded by stating that while there were challenges around funding and coordinating services on many levels, he applauded everyone in the room for their efforts.

### **3. Immigrant Integration Framework**

Darane Pestod, executive director of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR), shared an immigrant integration framework. GCIR defines immigrant integration as a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure vibrant and cohesive communities. There are six strategic pathways outlined in the framework:

- Community-wide planning
- Language and education
- Health, well-being and economic mobility
- Equal treatment and opportunity
- Social and cultural interaction
- Civic participation and citizenship

For more information on the framework, how it was developed and how it can be utilized, please visit [http://www.gcir.org/resources/gcir\\_publications/toolkit.php](http://www.gcir.org/resources/gcir_publications/toolkit.php)

#### **4. Silicon Valley Community Foundation**

Dr. Emmett D. Carson shared his perspective on the role and commitment of the community foundation in addressing immigrant issues. He noted that the community foundation is at a unique place having just formed in January 2007 and where the institution starts relative to immigration issues was not necessarily where it would end up.

Emmett also noted that in order for community foundations to be effective, these institutions need to represent the entire community and be reflective of multiple constituencies. Further, one of the most important things a community foundation can do is lend its voice and legitimacy to issues that it cares about. It is easy for a community foundation to distribute grants and much more difficult to put the institution's credibility on the line by taking a stand on a set of issues. Emmett stated that everyone could and should expect the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to be vocal when it comes to issues around immigration.

Emmett then discussed two of the community foundation's values: diversity and inclusiveness. To him, diversity means counting categories; categories are one measure to get at what you are doing. On the other hand, inclusivity is a two-way process and represents a different standard. He stated that the two parent community foundations were not as diverse or as inclusive as they needed to be; Silicon Valley Community Foundation is committed to changing that.

Emmett then shared his views on immigration by stating that one could talk about America without understanding the role of immigrants. He noted that on site visits to different parts of the region, he was overwhelmed by how our communities live on the backs of immigrants, but do not acknowledge or talk about it. He further stated that we as a society are complicit in policies that we choose to enforce or not enforce – we allow immigrants to work, but turn a blind eye when they need health care. Emmett said this was unacceptable and that it was time to tackle some of the bigger public policy and advocacy issues related to immigration.

Emmett concluded by saying he hoped this group would continue to come together and generate sound ideas related to action. He noted that he had never met an idea that was too controversial; he had met an idea that was not well researched or thought out. When the community foundation puts its name on something, it is putting its credibility on the line, so we have to know the idea is well-reasoned and well thought out. It has to have a chance at winning. Lastly, he urged participants in the day's convening to attend future strategic conversations that will be part of the Community Input Project. He said this was important to make sure there was an immigrant voice in these conversations and to ensure that we know how various issues impact immigrant communities.

## 5. Focused Conversation

Teresa Castellanos, from the Office of Human Relations, Immigrant Relations and Integration Services Program, introduced herself and the focused conversation portion of the meeting. She explained that there were four levels of questions ranging from very general, to participatory, to more action-oriented questions. What follows is a compilation of the questions and responses given by the participants.

### **What concerns you most about immigration issues?**

- Vastness of the issue.
- Lack of resources.
- Historical perspective is forgotten.
- No solutions.
- Don't have a voice; don't speak.
- People with money and power not including immigrants in the solutions.
- Advocacy groups are factionalized, which dilutes their impact.
- Responses to immigrant issues are always reactive and not proactive.
- Immigration reform bill [brings up] key issues around racism and xenophobia.
- Re-traumatization of refugee groups around certain policies.
- Immigration is a wedge issue that divides communities.
- Becoming a citizen is such a barrier.
- So much talent – communities cannot access it due to language barriers.
- Fear of losing identity/heritage – learning is a two-way street.
- Fear of certain tactics on the part of federal government (e.g., “return to sender”) in response to immigration issues.
- Rampant violations of human/civil rights of Latino communities – draconian/simplistic policies at the table.
- Pathways to livable wage jobs.
- Too much preaching to the choir and not enough talking to others who do not share the same views.
- Overlook global root causes as to why we have refugees.
- Label of immigrants being placed on all Latinos, regardless of whether or not they are born here.
- African immigrant community underserved/unserved, particularly around mental health issues.
- Many immigrants feel like second class citizens.
- There is a lack of strategic vision that can bring us together.
- The vast majority of Silicon Valley residents are ignorant of the immigrant experience.
- Immigrants are seen and labeled as “aliens.”
- How society views immigrants – seen as a burden.
- Increasing raids. Need for other ethnic groups to be part of the struggle, not just Latinos.
- Lack of alliances across communities, beyond immigrants.
- Discussion always focuses on problems and not the contributions of immigrants.

## What inspires you?

- Forming genuine alliances.
- See successes of families assimilating into country without losing their own identity.
- Belief in promise of what America can be.
- Infusion of immigrant issues into other issues.
- Inspired by stories of refugees; inspired to learn from them.
- Inspired by convenings like this that enable exploration of the more nuanced aspects of the immigration debate.
- Immigrants finding their soul – see who they were/what they are.
- Achieving justice for those who are victimized.
- Inspired by participation.
- Immigrant mothers transforming school districts.
- Success stories – people committed to working hard.
- Perseverance in the face of fear.
- A lot of communities not competing against one another.
- Expression of tremendous humanity in the face of discrimination.
- Lessons to learn about how immigrants leverage resources (i.e., doing a lot with a little).
- Inspired by young person finding their way back to their roots and cultural heritage.
- Self-determination of indigenous cultures and immigrants 500 years after the conquest.
- Examples of immigrant women getting out of domestic violence situations.
- People's willingness to sacrifice and live through harsh conditions because they believe that things will get better.
- Inspired by all stories – challenge to change mentality of the white middle class.
- Inspired by courage of people to come here and start over.
- Inspired by stories of children that are making their parents' dreams come true.
- Resiliency of the human spirit.
- Folks who are not immigrants committed to this issue.
- A community foundation committed to this work.
- Inspired by values immigrant families bring.
- Youth in our schools and colleges who honor their parents.
- Spirituality of our communities.

### **Immigrant Integration Issues – What are the unmet needs?**

- Do not have enough data to fully understand.
- Need for permanent residency for immigrants.
- All needs have not been met.
- Humane immigration reform.
- Champions/leadership from mainstream institutions and from society in general to embrace immigrant integration.
- Lenient legislation to protect undocumented individuals.
- A way to bring these groups together on a regular basis.
- Culturally competent services.
- Funders need better understanding.
- Older immigrants – the needs of monolingual adults (citizenship, mental health).

### **What are the top three barriers to immigrant integration?**

- Language
- Racism/xenophobia
- Lack of understanding on how to impact public policy.
- Lack of civic participation due to fear.
- Lack of income – low wage jobs.
- Lack of time to access basic services.
- America's framework of zero sum game – somebody wins and somebody loses.
- Acceptance of community at large.
- Lack of understanding of different cultures and impact on organizations.
- Viable voice to market accomplishments and impact of organizations.
- Lack of unified strategy that includes multiple approaches to issues.
- Institutional racism – low wages, lack of resources, lack of transportation.
- Small, emerging ethnic providers do not have access to funding.
- Lack of rights and resources available to immigrants.
- Zero sum game that keeps providers from being seen as collaborators.

### **What strategies and supportive practices are working?**

- Santa Clara County Citizenship Collaborative.
- Open Houses.
- Multi-ethnic organizations, sharing stories, getting to know each other and personalizing human stories to change hearts and minds.
- Recognizing immigrant experiences are not labeled by race only.
- Children's Health Initiative to get every undocumented child immunized.
- Framing issues more broadly, not just as immigrant issues.
- Create dialogue on hot button issues.
- One East Palo Alto collaborative sponsored employment program – created for youth with obstacles, undocumented, community mentors for six weeks.
- Multi-cultural, micro-enterprise opportunities (e.g., refugee artisans).

- Train the trainer programs like Promotores.
- Hosting cultural diversity events.

### **What are action ideas?**

- Continuing to convene together as a group.
- Muslim community survey identified important needs.
- Longitudinal study on needs of immigrants in 2010 to understand full needs.
- Promote dialogues among different immigrant groups to understand different experiences.
- How can community foundation use nonprofit organizations and their expertise and data to sensitize the larger community?
- Funders to set the table so immigrant agencies are invited.
- Need to get out to bigger community.
- Legality issues too rigid.
- Getting community-at-large involved – immigration reform is not just an immigrant issue, but a human one.
- Have multi-cultural festival to represent all communities and how they can work together. Need to show that immigrant issues are not just Latino, but broader.
- National debate is taking place on amnesty programs. How can a group like this one help?
- South Bay Alliance for immigration reform.
- Neighborhood associations on smaller scale to build.
- Get businesses informed and engaged.
- Formal training around impact of trauma on refugees.
- Partner with KQED. Develop community forums around the economic benefits of immigration.
- Put a human face on immigrant stories. Need a media campaign to create a tipping point.
- Translate citizenship test in multiple languages.

Teresa concluded this portion of the meeting by sharing a poem by Michael D. Vritt called *Community*.

## **6. Closing Remarks**

Sheryl Muñoz-Bergman from the International Institute, and Samina Faheem Sundas from American Muslim Voice made some final requests of the community foundation:

Our work as a community is grounded in building and supporting strategic partnerships across communities, philanthropy and government that nurture an interdependent, equitable, vibrant and sustainable Silicon Valley region. We believe that philanthropic frameworks that foster immigrant integration throughout society are essential to this in the globalized reality of our region. Toward this end, we believe Silicon Valley Community Foundation can contribute to this vision by:

1. Adopting an immigrant integration framework as a core and cross-cutting component of its vision and strategy going forward.
2. Being an active champion in advocating for immigrant integration strategies and resources across the region.
3. Creating funding programs that measurably increase community foundation resources directed at immigrant communities across the region and leading other philanthropic institutions to follow suit (For example, Chicago and Los Angeles created jointly-funded, immigrant-focused funding and strategic initiatives).

4. Instituting concrete mechanisms to ensure ongoing relationships with immigrant communities in the region. Mechanisms should include, but not be limited to, integration of immigrant leaders onto the Board of Directors of Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the establishment of a Silicon Valley Community Foundation Immigrant Advisory Council.

## **7. Next Steps for Silicon Valley Community Foundation**

Erica Wood thanked Teresa Castellanos for her superb facilitation as well as Heather Saito Lastra, the event coordinator. Erica confirmed that a proceedings document would be generated and sent to all participants. She also reminded the group of the Community Input Project, a way for participants to connect with future community conversations.

Emmett Carson asked that participants “hold our feet to the fire”. He stated that if the community foundation falls short in meeting expectations, let us know. This is just the first step; it is not the last.