

Social Justice Funders SPOTLIGHT:

Unbound Philanthropy • New York, NY & London, England

As fear and misunderstanding about immigrants and refugees drive people and politics apart around the world, Unbound Philanthropy supports work that brings people together and assists newcomers as they find a sense of belonging in their adopted communities.

Based in New York City and London, the private foundation takes a holistic, long term approach to grantmaking in the multi-layered, multi-sector, and always controversial area of world migration. The organizations and movements Unbound Philanthropy funds highlight the contributions of immigrants and benefits of immigration, shape new narratives about immigrants, improve the lived experience of immigrants, fight against exclusionary and punitive policies and practices, and build communities of mutual respect and shared responsibility. An aspiration to remove boundaries to self-determination underlies the organization's social justice strategy.

"The mission is very personal to everyone in our organization," said Taryn Higashi, Unbound Philanthropy's executive director. "Many people at Unbound have said our work has deepened their connection to their own family history. The heart of our commitment is to dignify the treatment of immigrants and refugees and their inclusion and integration into communities."

Unbound Philanthropy supports organizers, civil rights and immigration lawyers, and organizations that improve relationships between new Americans and people born in the United States, and between people new to the UK and those born there. Unbound also believes that arts and culture can expand empathy and a broader, more inclusive national identity, in ways that complement organizing, advocacy, and communications strategies. In the United States, Unbound led a large-scale cultural

strategy to transform understanding of people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and other communities affected by harmful portrayals in popular culture. Several large American foundations have increased funding to immigration-related organizations in recent years. But most foundations focus on one or



Several young adults, in shorts and tee shirts, play soccer. Image courtesy of Unbound Philanthropy and Welcoming America North Carolina

perhaps two areas of the work — say, human rights or ending human trafficking. Unbound stands out for its interconnected wide-ranging work and for its dedication to immigrant-led organizations and assisting immigrants without authorization to be in their adopted nations.

Higashi noted that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Unbound supported its grantees as they "pivoted" in their work. This included, for example, using grant dollars to help free immigrants from detention and prisons, which became more dangerous. Following the murder of George Floyd and the protests it engendered, Unbound, Higashi said, "recommitted to centering the fight for racial justice and the fight against white supremacy..." Unbound provided some of the earliest investments in black immigrant led organizations and campaigns along with multiracial organizations that build cross-racial communities. In response to "exhaustion" and "burnout" in the immigrant justice field, Unbound staff recently

simplified its grant application, provided more long term operational funding for grantees and made grants to support wellness among grantees.

Unbound Philanthropy was founded in New York City in 2003, with an endowment from individual donors. Over the next several years, Unbound continued to grow, adding staff and opening an office in London. From 2005 to 2021, Unbound Philanthropy awarded 845 grants totalling more than \$100 million.

Unbound Philanthropy, Higashi explains, seeks to fill "strategic gaps" in the immigrant rights ecosystem. For example, beginning in 2008, Unbound's staff saw an opportunity to invest in immigrant-led advocacy.

"At the time, the immigrant rights field was led mostly by people who were not immigrants and refugees themselves," Higashi noted, including "dedicated and talented professional advocates, communicators, researchers and lawyers" And, she added, "We felt that this work could be transformed if immigrants began to tell their own stories and could help develop a new narrative and strategies."

One of the immigrant-led organizations that Unbound Philanthropy decided to support is United We Dream (see story on back page), which is now the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the United States. Higashi met members of UWD as they were first coming together as undocumented immigrant youth hoping to tell their personal stories to policymakers and the public.

"We learned...that United We Dream was clearly going to be a powerhouse and there would be DREAMers forming their own organizations with their own strategies and vision," Higashi said. "They taught us the value of having the impacted community lead the efforts."

Unbound Philanthropy GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT:

United We Dream Network, Washington, DC

As a teenager, Cristina Jiménez lived with the fear of deportation, anxiety about the future and frustration over dreams denied. As an adult, she works to create a society where young immigrants are secure enough in their present lives to nurture big aspirations and realize a self-determined future.

Jiménez, co-founder and now managing director of the Washington, DC-based United We Dream Network, came to the United States from Ecuador in 1998 when she was 13. After her parents lost their jobs in their home country, they had no money for food or rent. Cristina, her brother and parents moved to New York, to join Cristina's aunt and try to build a better life.

Attending school in Queens, Jiménez earned high grades, took part in community service and planned to attend college, but she was devastated after a college counselor told her that she'd be ineligible for government aid and that, without a social security number, she may face other college enrollment barriers.

"It made me feel a deep sense of injustice," Jiménez said. "I wanted to do something about it and that is how I started to organize."

Jiménez began as an organizer and advocate in New York, where she and other young undocumented immigrants advocated for policies that would make it financially feasible and bureaucratically easier for them to attend college. Jiménez went on to graduate cum laude from Queens College, CUNY and, later, to earn a master's degree from the School of Public of Affairs at Baruch College, CUNY. In 2008 she and other undocumented young people entered the national stage when they created the United We Dream Network (UWD), which would later become an Unbound Philanthropy grantee. Unbound supports UWD's youth leadership development, organizing, alliance building and training, all of which have advance its mission to create a sustainable, grassroots movement led by immigrant youth and children of immigrants. UMD is now the largest immigrant youth-led network in the nation. It counts 1 million members across the United States and reaches 4 million people every month through social media platforms and via email. As of 2022, there are 25 United We Dream "hubs" across the United States where youth leaders develop advocacy agendas, provide information for immigrant communities and partner with other organizations to achieve policy and practice goals.

UWD's first campaign advocated for passage of the federal DREAM Act. This legislation would have provided undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children a path toward legal status if they attended college or served in the military. After the DREAM Act passed the House in 2009 but was blocked in the Senate by five votes in 2010, Jiménez and her undeterred UWD colleagues launched the Right to Dream

campaign a year later. United We Dream organized sit-ins, rallies, marches and used legal strategies and a digital storytelling campaign to demand that President Obama stick to a campaign pledge he made to support immigration reform during his bid for a second term. This helped build momentum for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), that allows certain young undocumented immigrants to receive a renewable

two-year work permit and exemption from deportation. The program was instituted by President Obama by executive order in 2013, rescinded by the Trump Administration in 2017 and then revived again by President Biden in 2021. It still faces threats in federal court.

Despite its precariousness, "(DACA) was one of the most historic and important victories for the immigrant community in the last 25 years," Jiménez said. UWD still works with state and federal education officials, local schools, churches, and other institutions to spread the word about the DACA program. The organization offered application clinics where applicants could meet with pro bono lawyers and submit applications. UWD has

helped 10's of thousands of young people apply for DACA.

UWD also educates young people about their rights, about racial profiling and the threats of deportation. The organization advocates against deportations that separate families and raises awareness about the harm of deportations on children and other family members who are left behind and provides support and resources for LGBTQ+ immigrant youth.

"We are focused on extending our reach to address systemic issues of injustice and oppression facing people of color, members of the LGBTQ community and women," Jiménez said. "We are committed to building a multiethnic immigrant youth-led organization to win justice and dignity for all in the United States."

This revised spotlight was compiled by Sandra Dias, Susan Eaton and Brian Stanley. The original version was published in 2016



Three young adults hold protest signs, one of which reads "No Fear We Are Here." Photo by Rodrigo Huertas courtesy of United We Dream

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