

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As part of a proactive effort to address the cross-cultural barriers that arise in culturally and ethnically diverse communities, in 2009 Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) developed a grant program called Bridging the Cultural Gap. With a focus on using cultural tactics to move hearts and minds in support of immigrant integration, the program was focused expressly on supporting projects that allowed for Silicon Valley residents to come together to discuss shared values and concerns related to immigration. Between 2009 and 2014, SVCF invested \$2.4 million in 12 projects that used cultural tactics such as dialogue, film, photography and storytelling to deepen relationships and cross-cultural understanding throughout San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Over the course of five years, these grantees, with support from SVCF, focused their activities on identifying and cementing shared values between immigrants and receiving communities, as well as building relationships within and across various communities in the region.

Throughout the duration of the grant program, SVCF collaborated with the strategy firm Active Voice to create a more cohesive, coordinated effort while building grantees' capacity for communicating, engaging the community and documenting impact. Through regular grantee gatherings, communications trainings, evaluation tools and a regional Action Summit, the program allowed grantees to build collaborations with each other and advance a shared goal of creating more cultural harmony throughout Silicon Valley.

With a focus on relationship building, storytelling, and strategic alignment of activities and goals, the initiative was successful in contributing to a range of outcomes, including:

- sustained relationships and growing networks;
- new champions of immigrant integration;
- heightened civic participation among immigrants and receiving communities;
- advancement of policy and institutional change;
- a heightened sense of agency among immigrants and grantees; and
- a region-wide attitude shift in support of immigrants.

The process also helped clarify the need for sustained resources and capacity building in order to support the long-term success of cultural projects.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Immigration in Silicon Valley**

As of 2014, more than one-third of the 2.5 million residents in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties are immigrants, and almost two-thirds of those younger than 18 are children of immigrants. Immigrant entrepreneurs have contributed considerably to innovation and job creation in Silicon Valley, and nearly half of the workforce is foreign-born.

Still, Silicon Valley immigrants face significant hurdles. A recent study from the Insight Center for Community Economic Development at San Jose State University revealed that 40% of San Mateo County immigrants reported making less than \$20,000 a year. Data from the same study indicate that to meet the most basic expenses for a family of three in San Mateo County, one would need to earn \$78,945—which is more than can be earned from four full-time minimum-wage jobs.<sup>1</sup>

## **BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAP**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.siliconvalleycf.org/sites/default/files/publications/svcf\\_san\\_mateo\\_county\\_immigrant\\_focus.pdf](http://www.siliconvalleycf.org/sites/default/files/publications/svcf_san_mateo_county_immigrant_focus.pdf)

## **The Need**

*“We’ve seen fear [among immigrants] in workplaces—people suffering abuse and not wanting to stand up to their employers. People are not asking for help in health and medical needs.”*

*– Rabiah Khalid, Advocacy Manager, Asian Americans for Community Involvement*

Fear and misunderstanding of newcomers has fueled anti-immigrant sentiment throughout American history. As our nation recovers from a recession in which a very small portion of the population is seeing the bounce-back that the markets have seen, people continue to feel at risk of losing employment and stability, further exacerbating this fear. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, in an area as diverse and as thriving as Silicon Valley, there is a general sense of apathy and indifference among many nonimmigrant receiving communities.

To compound the issue, many Silicon Valley immigrants, especially the undocumented who face threats of detention and deportation, are afraid to engage beyond their immigrant networks. For example, Cindy Marroquin of Redwood City 2020 (RWC2020), an SVCF grantee who brings together immigrants and nonimmigrants, reports that she often has difficulty attracting immigrants to dialogue circles because they are hesitant to share their stories with people they don’t know.

## **The Investment Approach**

Recognizing the challenges that arise in a region of rapid demographic shift as well as the need to address perception barriers, Silicon Valley Community Foundation made a deliberate investment in cultural projects throughout the region. Building upon SVCF’s preexisting investments in direct services for immigrants and in an effort to deepen cultural understanding, combat fear and misperception, and, ultimately, build a pathway for more integrated and inclusive communities, Bridging the Cultural Gap went a step further by targeting not only receiving communities, but also immigrants. Through dialogue, film, cultural engagements and communication efforts, BCG projects were designed to dismantle the “us versus them” paradigm, bring groups together around shared values and common ground, and provide a safe space for honest conversation and problem solving. The long-term vision of BCG was to advance policy and systems change that supports all Silicon Valley residents and helps the region thrive, both culturally and economically.

SVCF request for proposals (RFP) for the project solicited multifaceted ideas from the region’s nonprofit providers. Each successful project:

- 1) shared accurate information about the cultures and people involved, based on the conviction that accurate information, combined with frank discussions, can eliminate misunderstandings and misperceptions;
- 2) raised questions, shared concerns and fostered engagement in a dialogue that created authentic relationships; and
- 3) were built on commonalities based on shared interests and experiences that also constructively addressed differences.

Over five years, the community foundation invested \$2.4 million in 12 projects that had the greatest likelihood for success. Grantees were awarded one-year grants that were eligible for renewal if the following criteria were met:

- Significant number of people served
- Meaningful benchmarks and indicators of success
- Sufficient organizational capacity to sustain the project
- Track record in specific program area

- Leveraging of other resources
- Contribution to content area knowledge and practice

Depending on the type of proposed activity, applicants also were asked to comment on their existing program’s effectiveness, their plans for scaling up activities and the need for piloting a new service within the region.

### The Projects

Bridging the Cultural Gap represented a range of projects from different types of organizations throughout Silicon Valley, including multiyear dialogue projects, film production, community-based websites, and workshops and trainings.

| Organization                                     | Project Description  |
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| <b>Asian American Recovery Services</b>          | The Vietnamese Community Integration Campaign used popular theater, fishbowl dialogue circles, and an ethnic and mainstream media campaign to create dialogue between Vietnamese and receiving communities.  |
| <b>Asian Americans for Community Involvement</b> | The Asian American Voices project used film, dialogue, multimedia tools and community engagement programs to deepen understanding of immigrant experiences and contributions.  |
| <b>Collective Roots</b>                          | The Immigrant Health Integration and Advocacy Project in East Palo Alto used garden-based learning to engage migrant families around the intersection of food, health and the built environment.   |
| <b>Day Worker Center of Mountain View</b>        | <i>Borderless Dreams</i> is a short documentary that captures the experiences of day workers in Mountain View. In addition to screening the film and hosting a series of dialogues, the project included a blog featuring stories and observations written by day workers.   |
| <b>Institute for Local Government</b>            | The Civic Participation Project aimed to increase the engagement of immigrants in planning and policymaking by local and county governments and to support broader and deeper integration into civic and political life.   |
| <b>Midpeninsula Community Media Center</b>       | Made into America is a multimedia website featuring stories of Silicon Valley residents and their ancestors who immigrated to the United States, along with a series of public events that revolve around storytelling. The center also collaborated with the Day Worker Center of Mountain View on the documentary <i>Borderless Dreams</i> . |
| <b>Nuestra Casa</b>                              | <i>Chronicles of Hope</i> is a short documentary that was used to educate stakeholders—parents, school personnel and board members—in the receiving communities of the Sequoia Union High School District about the multiple issues encountered by local students.   |
| <b>PACT: People Acting in Community Together</b> | The Changing Hearts, Minds & Policies campaign promoted and demonstrated immigrant integration through story sharing, community dialogues and grassroots organizing.   |
| <b>Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center</b>      | The Immigrant Engagement Program used facilitated dialogue, leadership development, community-led action and policy change to build positive relationships between communities.  |
| <b>Peninsula Interfaith Action</b>               | The Safe Corridor campaign for immigrants and their families created opportunities for dialogue and built cohesive communities that value families and offer opportunity for all.  |
| <b>Redwood City 2020</b>                         | Redwood City Together promoted a welcoming, inclusive climate for all who live or work in Redwood City.  |

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| <b>San Mateo County Sheriff's Office</b>                       | The Community Alliance to Revitalize Our Neighborhood built trust and cooperation between the community and the sheriff's office through dialogues, educational workshops and community academies.   |
| <b>SIREN: Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network</b> | SIREN led and coordinated an advocacy and communication campaign in Silicon Valley for comprehensive immigration reform.   |
| <b>Silicon Valley DeBug</b>                                    | The Valley's Story of Arrival and Becoming project produced multimedia stories on immigrants by youth.   |
| <b>Somos Mayfair</b>   | Teatro Popular created new presentations and recruited and trained Mexican and Vietnamese resident actors in theater development to create participatory, creative and engaging spaces for community residents to enter into dialogue and analysis about relevant issues to their lives. |

### **STRATEGY AND BEST PRACTICES**

Unlike Silicon Valley Community Foundation's investments in language acquisition and legal services for immigrants, Bridging the Cultural Gap's projects focused on awareness, engagement, and connection between immigrants and receiving communities. The methods were designed to deepen trust and relationships, especially through story sharing and dialogue. Understanding the need to align these cultural projects as part of a larger strategy for immigrant integration, SVCF solicited the support of Active Voice, a San Francisco-based communications strategy organization that specializes in using story for social change.

At the outset of the initiative, Active Voice convened BCG grantees to identify shared goals for the overall initiative. Ultimately, the cohort agreed they wanted their collective effort to:

- 1) engage people "beyond the choir";
- 2) get receiving communities actively involved in supporting immigrant integration;
- 3) train immigrant communities to be their own spokespeople; and
- 4) build networks large enough to support system and policy changes to foster harmonious, thriving communities.

### **Strategies Essential to Advancing the Work of the BCG Cohort**

#### A Values-Based Approach

Since many of the grantees in the BCG cohort primarily had worked only with immigrant communities prior to launching their BCG projects, they had to push outside their comfort zones to consider the needs and values of receiving communities. During a set of early meetings, Active Voice worked with grantees to dissect the barriers between immigrants and receivers, identifying shared values like healthy families, economic prosperity, safe communities and quality education for all children. Once these values were defined, the grantees set on a path informed by empathy, wherein immigrants and receivers could see each other as fellow human beings with more commonalities than differences.

#### Strengthening Community Relationships

Given BCG's mission of bridging cultural gaps, it was critical for each project to focus on opportunities to build and strengthen ties among and between community residents. To make it manageable, grantees identified specific communities they wanted to prioritize. For example, some grantees were successful in engaging residents from second- and third-generation immigrant families of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Others reached out to differently marginalized communities, such as LGBT and low-income receiving communities of color. In many instances, these types of activities successfully convened people who had

never heard from their counterparts in the community, forging new relationships that hadn't previously existed.

As part of the relationship-building process, grantees also recognized that it was essential to listen to the needs of receiving communities. For example, as PIA and PACT sought to build relationships with clergy in the region, they worked with immigrant and nonimmigrant religious leaders to understand how scripture could be used to help communities understand immigration. That process resulted in the creation of sermons co-written by immigrant and nonimmigrant faith leaders, which have since been shared with congregations throughout the region.

#### Fostering Inter-Organizational Collaboration

With a vision of leveraging resources and fostering a self-sustained network, SVCF and Active Voice encouraged grantees to consider different ways they could collaborate with other organizations and community institutions. The first step in this process was for the grantees to convene every two months, during which they had the opportunity for ongoing networking, idea-sharing and collaborative brainstorming. Facilitated by Active Voice, each gathering had a different focus, sometimes featuring training by communications consultants and sometimes focusing on internal brainstorming among grantees.

To further facilitate collaboration, SVCF hosted a region-wide Action Forum in February 2012 in which approximately 200 immigrant-serving groups, community-based organizations, policymakers and business leaders participated. The forum provided an opportunity to showcase the work of the BCG grantees and to engage the broader community in dialogue about immigrant integration. After a couple of years into the program, grantees began to see the benefit of pooling their resources to maximize impact.

#### Building Communications Capacity

The BCG program also focused on providing ongoing training and capacity building for grantees, specifically with regard to communications, which is notoriously under-resourced in nonprofit organizations. As part of the bimonthly cohort gatherings and via one-on-one support from Active Voice and other consultants, SVCF invested in capacity building in the following areas:

- Messaging and framing
- Press and social media engagement
- Storytelling
- Communicating impact

#### **OUTCOMES**

*"The [BCG] cohort authentically changed the way we looked at ourselves, intentionally and purposefully. Through dialogues we had at BCG, we became more deeply committed to social justice."*

*—Michelle Vilchez, Executive Director, Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center*

Overall, Bridging the Cultural Gap contributed to stronger relationships, new allies in support of immigrant integration, and a sense of greater harmony and inclusion in the Silicon Valley region. Throughout the process, grantees also were reinvigorated to pursue their missions with new resources and one another's support, and they remain committed to creative approaches to support harmonious, thriving communities. Ultimately, the initiative yielded the following outcomes.

#### Stronger Relationships, Growing Networks

Given the long-term, relationship-based nature of BCG's work, grantees that were part of the cohort for multiple years really had the opportunity to see progress, both as a result of increased partnerships in the community and a ripple effect of engagement. Moreover, grantees with a long-term investment were able to plant roots for sustained engagement.

#### New Champions for Immigrant Integration

BCG projects allowed for grantee organizations to secure greater investment in immigrant integration among community leaders and decision makers. A great majority of the organizations have been working with law enforcement to address how to fairly and humanely enforce recently enacted immigration laws. Representatives from PACT and PCRC are often now requested at county meetings because of their diplomatic and successful "bridging" experiences.

#### Policy and Institutional Change

Many grantees were able to tap into the growing networks they built to generate support for policy initiatives such as voter turnout, Santa Clara's detainer policy and California Assembly Bill 60, which allows individuals without documentation to obtain a driver's license. As a result of communitywide support, Bill 60 passed in October 2013.

#### Sense of Agency Among Immigrants and Grantees

The BCG projects, which focus on "softer" approaches to integration—understanding, trust, communication—led to a sustained sense of agency among immigrants in the community. For example, RWC2020 reported higher levels of immigrant youth involvement in their Young Ambassadors program, an initiative designed to encourage young people to voice their concerns and take on more leadership roles in their schools. As for the grantees themselves, Jenne Wood-Taylor of PACT summed it up well: "What happens when an organizer learns that SVCF is invested this way is, it gives me hope, makes me feel credentialed and validated. I feel very supported, and confident people who matter [in philanthropy] believe in what we do."

#### Region-wide Attitude Shift

Between September and December 2013, Active Voice conducted a two-county BCG Evaluation Survey to assess whether the BCG projects had contributed to the attitudinal shift in support of immigrant integration. Of the 291 responses collected from Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, roughly half had attended an event held by a BCG grantee. Over a range of issues related to immigration, the differences between those who attended and those who did not indicated that the BCG successfully contributed to "changing hearts and minds," with the vast majority of participants saying their views had been influenced positively to some degree and more than 40% saying "very much so."

The following are participant quotes from the survey:

*"[The events] made me feel that every resident of the area deserves the right to attend school and have a meaningful job. We need to reevaluate our current immigrant laws, especially for families." —San Mateo County resident, white, native-born, 25-34 years old, postgraduate degree; attended a total of five events over the past four years: Workshops, Trainings and Making Dreams Come True events; attended through Redwood City Together*

*"Being an immigrant, I had my personal reasons for supporting [immigration reform], and I didn't think others would see it that way. But to hear businessmen, politicians and teachers giving their support and making it more of a civil rights issue more than anything else really made me quite happy. It gave me hope, when I thought it was a lost cause." —Alameda County resident, Latino immigrant, 25-34 years*

*old, college degree; attended a total of four events over the past four years: Marches and Rallies; Attended through PACT, SIREN and the Day Worker Center of Mountain View*

## **REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The following are some of the lessons and successes that will have significance in the design of future work in this area.

### Cultural Projects, Organizational Goals Must Align

In the early phases of BCG, many grantees were conducting cultural activities without considering (a) how it would support their organizational goals and (b) how to sustain momentum. When Active Voice got involved, it encouraged grantees to spend time reflecting on what their organizations were hoping to accomplish in the short, medium and long term and how they could leverage their cultural projects in order to support those goals. For example, if an organization was working on advancing a particular policy, they leveraged their cultural activities to raise their visibility among “beyond the choir” residents and build their email list for future policy actions. This integrated approach helped grantees consider how their cultural projects could be used as tools to advance their goals as opposed to being unrelated side activities.

### Collaboration Essential to Advancing Region-wide Goals

Given that this initiative had clear goals to shift hearts and minds around immigrant integration across the region, it inherently required the participation of many organizations. SVCF took a deliberate approach in helping foster connections and collaboration among grantees, but it was never forced. Instead, SVCF opted to bring in an intermediary, Active Voice, to work with grantees over time and help them identify shared goals. This ongoing dialogue led to organic connections among the grantees, and now they see the benefits of leveraging their respective resources. This would not have been possible if grantees had not had the opportunity to identify their own points of common interest. Moreover, it would not have been possible in a one-year grant term. It was not until the third year of the grant program that genuine collaborations started taking root, but the first two years of cultivation were essential.

### Engagement Trumps Outreach

Data from Active Voice’s community study reveal that certain types of programming influence participants more than others. Of the individuals who participated in a training, workshop, film screening or dialogue event, 39% to 46% said that these activities changed their views on immigration “very much,” whereas only 24.5% of those who attended Art Exhibit events said that this activity changed their views “very much.” Active Voice makes the distinction between the first set of activities and Art Exhibits as that of “engagement” versus “outreach.” “Engagement” implies mutual participation and an active exchange of information from both attendants and facilitators. “Outreach” implies a one-way transfer of information, and audiences are only required to view or listen to content, without reciprocally providing their input.

### Nonprofits Need Significant Investment in Communications

BCG took a deliberate step in focusing on building communications capacity for grantees, but the reality was that most grantee organizations had neither a dedicated communications person nor the time to invest in deep communications strategy and approach. Despite being located in the heart of the technology and communications industry, Silicon Valley nonprofits rarely have access to the tools and resources of private communications and media companies. “We need to incorporate the evolution of the time. We need more digital documentation and digital skill building,” said Deputy Miqueo. Some

grantees took the opportunity to leverage their grants to acquire dedicated communications staff; others allotted time for training and communications projects for staff already on board. Moving forward, a focus on partnerships between marketing-savvy private sector entities and nonprofits would benefit communities across the board.

#### Narrower Focus May Yield Better Results

Cross-grantee collaboration and the identification of common goals brought to light new, differently focused strategy ideas. “I really like that the relationship building has been a stepping stone to systemic change,” noted Diaz. “Now is the time to show how that’s coming about. Housing, predatory lending, ESL classes and requirements—how can we use these dialogue examples to show that we built support [for good policies] and take them to the next level?” As mentioned above, zeroing in on particular policies and issues that affect a wider group of people builds networks quickly. This is not to say there aren’t urgent issues that affect immigrant populations more directly, but to sustain support for those, it will be important to continue to secure “beyond the choir” allies.

#### Multiyear Investments Benefit Cultural Projects

The majority of BCG grantees benefited from receiving a grant in this area for more than one year. It enables these grantees to track how they’ve seen their communities evolve for the better, and all will attest that it took the entire duration of the time they were funded. BCG grants given over multiple years were renewal grants, meaning no grantee was guaranteed support for more than one year. In general, grantees proved nimble enough to build upon past years’ strategies even in the face of uncertain resources, but financial stability, especially in hearts-and-minds-shifting work, would turn us toward a new, more progressive chapter in this kind of grantmaking.

#### Effective Evaluation Requires Clear Definition of Goals

Measuring the impact of an investment like BCG requires a different approach from traditional evaluation, that is, one that acknowledges the cultural context and the contribution of the projects as part of a larger goal. Although early evaluators were focused on capturing quantitative data, like number of participants and repeat participants at cultural activities, a lot of the more substantive outcomes were not captured in the evaluation until Active Voice got involved. The initiative would have benefited from a clear strategy from the outset, including a set of clear short-, medium- and long-term goals that all the BCG projects were building toward. This would have allowed us to capture baseline data at the beginning of the initiative and measure progress throughout the course of the five years.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the impact of cultural engagement may be difficult to quantify via traditional measures, Bridging the Cultural Gap demonstrated that using cultural projects to address misperceptions and misunderstandings is indeed a useful strategy for strengthening communities and advancing immigrant integration. Cultural projects, which open up opportunities for shared experience and new interaction, are natural springboards for relationship building and dialogue. Bridging the Cultural Gap demonstrated that when these projects are approached strategically and in a coordinated way, they can yield powerful results that resonate across a region. Ultimately, these projects are about enhancing a two-way street over the long run, so efforts like these will yield the most success when there is opportunity for genuine dialogue and engagement and a long-term plan of action.