

Immigration and Philanthropy: A Conversation with Geri Mannion and Taryn Higashi

by Joyce Baldwin

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—Taryn Higashi,
cofounder, Four
Freedom Fund

Editors’ note: Joyce Baldwin recently interviewed Geri Mannion and Taryn Higashi, the cofounders of Four Freedoms Fund. In 2003, Mannion, the program director of the U.S. Democracy and Special Opportunities Fund at Carnegie Corporation of New York, and Higashi, then the executive director of Unbound Philanthropy, joined forces to launch Four Freedoms Fund (FFF), a funding collaborative housed at Public Interest Projects.

Five years later, the collaborative has provided \$25 million to support 85 grassroots efforts in 33 states and has developed a unique collaborative working style that maximizes funders’ ability to support local and state efforts that are connected to a national campaign, all aimed at helping immigrants become citizens and actively participate in our democracy. In the following interview, Mannion and Higashi discuss the work of FFF, some of the lessons learned from the collaborative approach, and goals for the future.

Joyce Baldwin: What is the core intention of Four Freedoms Fund?

Taryn Higashi: The foundations that are investing in immigrants and civic integration do so as part of their bigger mission. At Carnegie Corporation, the goal is strengthening U.S. democracy and civic participation for the whole country. For me, at Ford—and now at Unbound Philanthropy—it is to advance human rights and social justice for all communities. In fact, while all of the donors to FFF may come to

the collaborative fund because it relates to their foundation’s specific program objectives, they see our overall work as promoting justice and fairness for everyone in the United States.

JB: How would you characterize philanthropic support for immigrant policy in the United States today?

TH: In the 15 years I’ve been involved in immigration-related grantmaking, there has been a great deal of growth in the amount of money going into the field, the number of foundations funding, and the expertise and collaboration among foundations, but there are still many gaps in geographic coverage and issue coverage.

JOYCE BALDWIN has written extensively about immigration issues for Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Geri Mannion: In the last decade, the demographic changes in the country, especially as immigrants migrate to new destination states in the South, Midwest, and West, have made it more imperative that funders—whether national or local—consider who the newcomers in their communities are and their needs.

In addition, since 9/11, with concerns about national security and increases in [racial] profiling, especially among Arab, Middle Eastern, and other people of color, there has been a need for philanthropy to provide support for many of the legal and advocacy groups that can help ensure that individual legal rights aren't abused. More recently, increased anti-immigrant rhetoric has motivated many legal residents to become naturalized citizens. Since 9/11, the naturalization process has also become much more complicated and expensive; applicants therefore need more help from legal and social-service groups in moving through that process, so there is an opportunity, especially in the new destination states, to provide English-language training, education in civics, and help with applying for naturalization. The opportunity to help immigrants integrate socially, politically, and economically is huge. Local foundations can play a central role in helping these newcomers and their families become American.

JB: *Why is this an opportune time for funders who are considering getting involved in this area to join in the effort?*

TH: It is a great time for new funders to get involved. A good deal of time and philanthropic money has already been spent on laying the groundwork and doing research to clarify goals—for example, to define what would comprise workable immigration policies at the federal level and effective integration policies at state and local levels—and to understand public opinion on these issues. Immigrant-serving organizations and networks have been created, and a few generations of leaders have emerged and built relationships with one another and have gone through several cycles of learning. Therefore, in almost any funding area of the immigration and civic

integration field that you invest in—immigration policy, immigrant education, immigrant health, immigrants and economic development, for example—new funders in this area are building on a strong base of knowledge and experience. In addition, there is an opportunity to share experiences and best practices with other funders that have done similar work.

Yet while much has been started, nothing is yet at scale, and the issues and context of the immigrant experience in the U.S. are constantly changing. That means there is a great deal of space for replication and refinement, building on the investments that have already been made. Plus, with the Obama administration, which is so international in focus and so welcoming and supportive of the diversity created by immigration, there is an opportunity for the immigrant integration and rights field to join in helping move policies in a wide number of issue areas that will benefit the larger public good.

From all accounts, the new administration will also tackle federal immigration reform in its first term. If successful, there will be more than 12 million immigrants and their families who will become eligible for legalization. This will be a huge opportunity to help them become full participants in our economy and community and to help these newcomers get on the path to citizenship.

JB: *How does FFF increase your funding ability?*

GM: FFF has a fabulous staff, and in many ways this is a very efficient method for large foundations to make grants in the states and at the local level. Our staff, headed by Magui Rubalcava Shulman, is highly experienced; all of the staff members have worked in civil rights, social justice, and/or in philanthropy. Public Interest Projects, which houses Four Freedoms Fund, also houses other funder collaboratives that work on social-justice issues, such as human rights and affirmative action. The staff of the other funding collaboratives can be called upon for expertise and help as needed. All of FFF's staff are exceptionally dedicated; they ensure that appropriate due diligence is conducted in reviewing proposals. They also

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A Model Capacity-Building Program

When Taryn Higashi was at the Ford Foundation, she convinced the organization to invest more than \$3 million to make a commitment beyond its usual allocation to immigration and integration. This funding launched a capacity-building initiative at Four Freedoms Fund (FFF). “Monona Yin and I worked together at Ford to develop it,” Higashi explains. “She was so committed to it that she joined FFF to run our capacity-building initiative, and it has been a huge success and very influential. Within Ford, other programs are looking at the model to replicate it and learn from it in their respective fields, and FFF has continued to raise money to expand and extend this initiative.”

Key to the success of the program has been the willingness of nonprofits to self-assess. “They’re very willing to share intimate details of what it means to run their organizations,” Geri Mannion says. “Even though, in some respects, they would be rivals for the same amount of money, they realize that by doing this, all the leaders of nonprofits are learning together.” In addition to meetings, all capacity-building participants take part in monthly phone calls, an especially important connection following the recession. They have also run recession management seminars, bringing in experts to talk to the groups.

The groups openly share details of their financial outlook, staffing issues, and what needs to be done for a nonpartisan civic engagement campaign. “It’s a learning community,” Mannion says. “They’re able to bring in the Nonprofit Finance Fund, which Carnegie Corporation helped support, to provide tutoring and help them with their financial outcomes. It’s been influential in helping them to get to the next level of institutional strength. We’re trying to see whether we can raise additional funding for the capacity building that would allow them to continue to have these conversations and learn from each other and really grow their organizations.”

Mannion notes that a funder collaborative is able to fund only if it raises money itself. “We always have to worry, especially with this recession, if we are going to be able to raise enough money to keep the programs going. If comprehensive immigration reform becomes a reality, and there is an ability to legalize folks, we want to be able to raise even more funds to help people through those next levels of legalization, naturalization, and integration.”

work closely with the grantees so the funders are kept up to date about the progress and challenges.

JB: *How is a funder’s relationship with grantees and other grantmaking organizations affected by its participation in FFF?*

TH: When we created FFF, there was some concern in the field that all the foundation money available to support work on immigration and civic integration would go through that fund and organizations would not have an opportunity to develop a direct relationship with Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, and the other funders.

That has not been the case at all. FFF supports groups at the state level directly, which the large national funders could not do; most of the donors fund national groups working in this area directly; we see all of this as complementary. In addition, there was some concern that the larger funders would dominate the decision making. But the fund is made up of donors who are very respectful. Everyone’s voice is heard; everyone has an equal vote, whether they represent one of the major foundations, such as Ford, or a small family foundation with regional focus, such as the Hagedorn Foundation in Long Island.

JB: *In what ways have you built the capacity of nonprofit groups that work to provide services to immigrants and advocate on behalf of them?*

GM: One of the striking features of FFF is the attention we give to building the capacity of our grantees. Under the direction of Monona Yin, FFF has crafted an amazing array of tools and support that nonprofits need to grow and be effective. Support has helped the larger, anchor immigrant coalitions to spend time together assessing the health of their organizations, sharing best practices, and having honest conversations about the challenges of their day-to-day work. The capacity-building program ensures they have access to technical assistance providers, such as the Nonprofit Finance Fund, to help them to understand the steps to financial health and for diversifying their funding base. Other groups, such as the Alliance for Justice, provide assistance and training to help with understanding the limits and the opportunities for undertaking advocacy, such as with nonpartisan voter engagement work and support for leadership development, including executive director coaching. Our grantees also get training in communications, e-advocacy and list building, nonpartisan voter engagement, etc. This kind of support has made a big difference, especially as [these groups] struggle to get through the recession. We are now planning to use webinars and other technologies to increase the number of grantees that can access these tools and supports [see “A Model Capacity-Building Program” at left].

JB: *Do you have an example of how funders learn from one another?*

TH: Darren Sandow of the Hagedorn Foundation, for example, helped us see that we needed to do much more to counter the racism and hate in the immigration debate. He works in a place where extremist nativist groups have been successful in distorting the immigration debate. Victims of hate crimes (and their families) have been irreparably damaged. A generation of young people in some areas of Long Island has grown up exposed to hate-based ideology; some teenagers have even been charged with hate crimes against Latino immigrants. Listening to Darren speak about the problems and the Hagedorn Foundation's attempts to fund solutions and then seeing how the extremist groups blocked efforts to reform local or federal immigration laws convinced me to invest more funds to expose and stem the hate. It's an intentional strategy.

GM: For me, because of my long experience in funding nonpartisan voter engagement work and my experience as former cochair of FCCP [Funders' Committee for Civic Participation], I was able to illustrate the importance of integrating civic engagement activities with the immigrant-rights focus. I was able to introduce funders in one area to another; now there's a lot of synergy and collaboration among the immigrant integration funders and the civic engagement funders. FCCP also works very closely with GCIR [Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees], which provides support and technical assistance to funders from the national to local level, and vice versa. We also have all learned about the importance of ensuring that strong communications and capacity-building strategies are part of any grantmaking strategy, regardless of goal or issue.

JB: *Are there other ways that working together collaboratively makes the whole bigger than its component parts?*

TH: FFF has allowed us to work on multiple fronts simultaneously. If we were just individual foundations working in isolation on immigration

and integration, we would replicate efforts, not be able to meet key needs promptly, and would need a tremendously long time to get to where we are now. Collaboration allows us to coordinate grantmaking across foundations and to work on multiple fronts simultaneously because we can use our understanding of how our different foundations have the staff, money, and capacity to do different things. When Carnegie Corporation organizes a meeting on religious leaders and immigration, for example, we all get invited and feel like we're part of that important alliance-building strategy. Even if our money isn't going to that particular project, it's something we've all agreed is a priority. And collectively, we get to move it forward.

GM: Each of our foundations has its own particular focus, as Taryn says. Together we really can think through our strategies and internal issues and say, "I'll support the policy development work; you support the enforcement." So we're able to move the money in a much more strategic way. It's not always perfect, but it is the best funder collaborative that I have been a part of. I also think it's been better for the immigrant-serving grantee community. Together, we have been much more able to cover the needs in a large number of states; we have also ensured that our collective grantees working at the national level (which we predominantly fund directly) are connected to our grantees in the field, and vice versa. This has led, with some fits and starts, to a much more coordinated and effective grantee cohort—or at least we think so.

JB: *Would you elaborate on that?*

GM: Taryn and I have worked well together for more than 10 years, so we had that familiarity. We had been working closely together before 9/11, and then after that tragedy and what occurred afterward related to immigrant rights, we saw how we needed to act much more proactively, more quickly, and in a more constructive way given that there was so much to do and there was so much need. We were also interested in supporting Muslim and Arab communities who were really feeling the impact of the security policies put in place after 9/11. We saw

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the real urgency to do something as funders in a much different way, and we’ve set up an ethos at FFF that is very much about being strategic, efficient, and supportive of the grantee cohort but, at the same time, ensuring our foundations’ grant funds are spent effectively and efficiently.

JB: *What about work with non-immigrant allies, such as groups that are concerned with social justice issues but not necessarily with immigration issues?*

TH: That’s an important new direction. Some of us are investing more money in work focused on non-immigrant allies. We all want to do more informed and useful grantmaking to bring immigrant communities and advocates into the broader movements for social justice. One of the most promising efforts that FFF has helped to develop is the nascent Welcoming America campaign, where community organizers and other advocates concentrate on getting to know long-term residents in a town and bring them together with new immigrants so that they can build relationships and identify shared concerns and interests. The campaigns, now in 14 states, work to encourage community problem solving. We also have invested in alliance building between the immigrant communities and traditional civil-rights groups, among others.

JB: *What new directions is FFF pursuing?*

GM: We are constantly trying to figure out how to raise additional funds to meet emerging needs. One of the new thrusts is to learn more about how to invest well in new-destination communities—such as in the South and parts of the West and Midwest. Those communities have changed enormously over the past decade; there have been stresses in areas such as interethnic/racial relations, on social services, and in the schools. We need to see how we can invest in those states, but in a way that leverages funds already in place. We really want to partner with local and/or state funders in mapping these possible new funding directions. And obviously with the recession, we may have fewer funds to invest, so we are trying to be sure we fund in new places responsibly.

JB: *As the immigration issue evolves, what are other upcoming issues that need to be addressed?*

TH: Regardless of outcome of the national immigration reform debate, there is strong consensus that (1) immigration enforcement is here to stay and (2) the immigrant rights field faces opportunities and challenges in influencing the policies and practices of immigration enforcement to ensure that they are fair, proportional, and humane as well as in compliance with civil rights, human rights, and constitutional protections. Through GCIR, FFF, and the U.S. Human Rights Fund, we can connect those interested in these issues with organizations and model programs they could emulate or, if they are a funder, to support and/or replicate. GCIR especially is incredibly helpful in talking to new funders about how to support this work; they have a wide range of resources available on their Web site that will help both funders and nonprofits to see what already is in place in more established gateways (www.gcir.org). Other issues that require more attention are the need to reform immigration policy with sensitivity to the unique situation of women, uniting them with their families and keeping them safe; treating fairly immigrants who are facing criminal charges; and ending discrimination in immigration law that negatively impacts gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and HIV-positive people. It is necessary to develop effective communications and public education about the most complex immigration issues and about the necessity of protecting civil, human, and constitutional rights of all immigrants at all stages of the immigration enforcement process.

GM: There is also a huge need in new-destination communities for even simple programs like English-language tutoring and ensuring people are protected as workers by being paid properly and having safe work environments. Issues that traditionally have been addressed by social-service providers also need attention. That includes spousal abuse; many immigrant women do not feel comfortable coming forward about abuse because of their immigration status. In the wake of raids, there is also a growing need for a network of social agencies and others to respond to issues,

such as what happens to children separated from their parents in the aftermath of a raid and how families get basic services, such as shelter and food and appropriate legal help.

There is also a great need to support advocacy groups that can educate policymakers at all levels about issues impacting immigrants. And it is important to encourage alliance building so that local leaders feel comfortable about speaking out in support of immigrants. There is also just a lot of plain misinformation about immigrants. The majority of immigrants without legal status want to become legal; but unless there is what is commonly known as comprehensive immigration reform, they can't fix their status even if they marry an American citizen, have American-born children, or pay for the best lawyers. There is nothing they can do until the law changes. They will continue to live in fear, in the shadows, unable to contribute economically or civically to their communities. There are many entry points for funders who have not worked on these issues. Regardless of what issues they are working on in their communities, they need to take into account whether the demographics of their communities have changed in the last 10 years and whether they are addressing these changes and the community needs.

TH: Another underfunded area that is absolutely critical is providing legal services for immigrants, in immigration and other civil-law proceedings—and also funding advocacy to give judges the ability to exercise discretion in deciding immigration cases. This is an area where there is positive, forward momentum, and corporations, law firms, and judges are involved. There is also foundation leadership that has piloted innovative projects to increase the availability, quality, and cost efficiency of providing legal services to immigrants.

JB: *Does the work of FFF help strengthen and energize our democracy?*

GM: This is an opportunity to work on an important national issue that impacts every sector of society. And it is something our nation has done all through its history. Just as the nation overcame

The Freedom from Fear Prize

In 2009 the Council on Foundations awarded Geri Mannion and Taryn Higashi the prestigious Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking for their work in founding Four Freedoms Fund. With the \$10,000 that accompanies the award, they have established the Freedom from Fear Prize. The prize will honor individuals who in their everyday lives “commit extraordinary acts of courage in defense of immigrant and refugee rights.” Contributions can be made by logging on to the Public Interest Projects Web site (www.publicinterestprojects.org). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the founders of Unbound Philanthropy have made commitments to match funds raised for the prize.

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xenophobia and anti-Catholicism at the turn of the 20th century, as the Irish, Italian, Poles, and other Europeans were immigrating to the U.S., and addressed the racism of the Chinese Exclusion Act, we will also help this current wave of immigrants to settle and integrate into our communities.

And if we want to make sure people are integrated fully—economically, socially and politically—then this is an issue that all nonprofits and funders need to consider. As leaders in philanthropy, we should be thinking of advocating for immigrants as one of the important public issues of the day because it is a necessary component of making our nation live up to its best intentions and to its best values. Data shows that helping immigrants become legal and productive citizens is a plus for the nation. They will contribute economically, pay taxes, and increase workers' rights so all workers will have protections and not be exploited. Not having a cohort of workers who live in the shadows will also raise wages for *all* workers. Good immigrant integration policies and comprehensive immigration reform generally offers a tremendous number of benefits for the country as a whole.

For more information on Four Freedoms Fund and its funders, see www.fourfreedomsfund.org.

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