

In Focus

Arizona Immigration Law: Funders Experience First-Hand and Respond

Contributed by Robert Bray and Henry Der, Four Freedoms Fund
Human Rights Funding News, IHRFG e-Newsletter, September 16, 2010

The charter bus of funders slowed to a stop on a scorching desert stretch of Interstate 19 last June at a border patrol checkpoint not far north of Nogales, Arizona, near the Mexican border. A stern officer boarded the coach, walkie-talkie and weapon holstered at his belt, and surveyed the passengers.

Most were representatives of national foundations from New York and around the country, as well as local funders. Also on board was staff of the Four Freedoms Fund (FFF), which organized the Arizona donor site visit and bus tour. Outside, the temperature was topping 108 degrees Fahrenheit.



“Your papers, please,” demanded the border agent. (Later, some of the funders would insist he checked passengers of color first for their identification.) After all papers were examined, donors questioned, national identities confirmed, and the agent was convinced no “illegal aliens” were on board, the bus was allowed to pass.

“Welcome to our daily world of immigration policy,” said one of the Arizona funders.

Indeed, these grantmakers got first-hand experience of the controversial and divisive practices that currently make up American immigration policy. In the process, they learned about funding strategies for responding to harsh enforcement at “ground zero” of the immigration debate.

But what were donors doing by the Arizona border – called by many immigrant advocates the “laboratory of hate” – in the first place?

Since the passage of Arizona Senate Bill 1070, foundations working at the intersection of immigrant rights, human rights, racial justice and civil liberties have shown heightened interest in Arizona. SB 1070, among other things, made it a misdemeanor crime for an immigrant to be in Arizona without carrying the required documents and authorizes Arizona police to stop anyone they “suspect” as being undocumented. In this way, the state law empowered local law enforcement authorities to take action on national immigration laws and in turn, sanctioned racial profiling. Major portions of the law were struck down in Federal Court.

One of the hallmarks of the Four Freedoms Fund and its parent organization, Public Interest Projects (PIP), is the ability to respond nimbly to urgent situations as they arise and marshal philanthropic

support. When SB 1070 passed in April 2010, FFF and PIP kicked into high gear to set up the donor tour and create a special funding apparatus, the Rapid Response Fund.

The goals of the Rapid Response Fund, along with the Four Freedoms Fund, are to provide support for groups acting swiftly to counter the Arizona law and similar anti-immigration action in other states, and to bolster the movement for national immigration reform. The Rapid Response Fund supports advocacy, outreach, community organizing and legal support for Arizona-based and other state groups responding to the law. Additionally, the Fund supports human rights training on documenting abuses; strategic communications, including the use of a human rights frame in messaging; and civic engagement efforts to encourage immigrant and Latino voter participation.

Donors to the Rapid Response Fund determine how best to fund the needs identified. As the Fund is not intended to be long-term, funds to support it are being raised within a short window of time and distributed as quickly as possible.

Through FFF and Rapid Response Fund, donors have been able to build the capacity of advocacy groups and strengthen civic engagement efforts. Specific grantees working in advocacy include the Somos America Coalition, Border Action Network and National Day Laborer Organizing Network. These groups, among others, are the first line of defense in preventing the “show me your papers” law from spreading across the country.

Resources for Funders:

To learn more about immigration funding opportunities and strategies in Arizona and elsewhere in the United States, contact Magui Rubalcava Shulman, Director of Immigration, Public Interest Projects, at +1. 612.871.6688 or mrubalcava@publicinterestprojects.org.

For more information about the the Rapid Response Fund and the Four Freedoms Fund, visit <http://www.publicinterestprojects.org/in-the-spotlight/arizona-and-beyond/>.