CA Bold Conference summary

On Wednesday, February 7, 2018, the USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration (CSII) brought together nearly 300 people for our conference, *California Bold: Leading Policies and Movements for Immigrant Integration*. The conference was an opportunity for people to come together from community-based organizations, governmental agencies, funders, civic leaders, and others to celebrate the work that has taken place across the state, discuss what needs to be done to defend current policies while developing new ones, and identify opportunities to deploy new strategies with the state and beyond.

The day opened up with welcomes by CSII, USC, and the Mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti. He pointed to the need to remain passionate and practical as we work in this environment with our current President.

Spoken word by Alina Amkhavong who shared a moving piece of healing through her personal story.

Moderated by Manuel Pastor, the morning plenary provided a platform to reflect on where we have come as a movement since the 2016 election, what has been done and where the state needs to go. Joining the panel was Zahra Billoo from CAIR-SFBA, Marielena Hincapie, National Immigration Law Center; Karthick Ramakrishnan, UC Riverside; Robert K. Ross, The California Endowment; and Angelica Salas. Speakers spoke to the work their respective organizations are focused on, how the situation with the White House requires the work to be smarter and bolder, and how California got to where it is through strong leadership, advocacy, and boldness. As the Administration enlarges the undocumented population, it is imperative that we think about all those affected, and not move forward at the expense of others, but take an inclusive approach. As people look at California as the model, we must reclaim the narrative and generate our own vision with inclusive policies so that we can go state by state to form broad coalitions.

Throughout the day, participants had the opportunity to attend ten workshop sessions, five before lunch and five after lunch. Workshop topics included:

**Morning**
A Time for Resistance: Effective organizing in the era of trump  
Stem the tide: reducing immigrant stressors and risk factors  
Still Adrift: Creating a home for refugees in the United States  
Strengthening capacities: Tools and innovation in immigrant integration  
Scale and Soul: Creating a people centered movement for immigrant integration
Afternoon
California Values: Winning and extending SB54
Seeding and Nourishing our Alliances: Creating intersectoral collaborations for sustained change
Our Vision, Our Voice: Narratives that shape the movement
Creating Communities that Prosper: Creating economic opportunities for immigrants
Where to Next: Upcoming battles in immigrant integration

Main Themes
The main themes that arose across all sessions include:

1. There is a lot of action happening at the local level, but there are still challenges.
   • Some of the good work taking place:
     • The L.A. Justice Fund is providing representation to those who cannot represent themselves like undocumented immigrants and those who are difficult to reach such as farmworkers or people in contact with criminal justice.
     • Good work like LA County’s taskforce on immigration is taking place – but, these efforts need better publicity.
     • SB54 is not a perfect policy, but it is good and it is imperative to work with law enforcement to ensure that it is implemented. In addition, it needs to publicized nationally.
     • Youth organizing is expanding.
   • Some challenges or areas in need of focus:
     • Smaller counties like Tulare County, which have large immigrant communities but may be more conservative often go unfunded – need to infuse funding there.
     • ICE is still showing up in safe spaces like clinics and other places – need to figure out how to stop this.
     • Need to begin discussions on how to fund and execute the 2020 Census count.

2. The importance of immigrant wellbeing, immigrant communities and immigrant activist needs to be lifted up throughout the staff. Some of which came up in discussions throughout the day, including:
   • Mental health – There is a lot of fear within immigrant communities and with mixed status families as well. Mental Health needs within immigrant communities should be discussed.
   • Self care – Leaders should model self care and leading from values that focus on the human aspects of immigrants, not just as a means to greater productivity.
   • Recognize assets – Meet immigrants where they are at and think about assets beyond financial contributions to communities/state/country.
   • Connections – Intersectionality is not just a buzzword, it signifies connections and thinking about the multiple aspects of individuals.
   • Art and culture – Bring more arts and culture into the movement to help break siloes and to reach youth.

3. Build a strong movement that learns from others, invests in youth, and builds transformational alliances. Some of the ways forward include:
   • Young people – Organizers, funders etc. need to train youth in organizing to take advantage of this political moment.
• **C4s** – Need to continue to build C4s to pressure the party system.
• **Build power** – Focus on relationships, shared histories, art, and you to build power by strengthening existing alliances to fortify transformational movements.
• **Learn from other movements** – There is a lot to learn from the LGBTQ movement and the movement for marriage equality.

4. There is a clear imperative to change the narrative. Some of what needs to be included in that narrative are:
   • **Inclusivity** – Narrative needs to be inclusive of indigenous, transgender, day laborers, youth, refugees, black immigrants, Asian immigrants, all immigrants – to be able to tell a fuller story.
   • **Leading with values** – Need to focus on humanity, inequality, and not turning to the cost/benefit arguments anymore.

**Keynote**
Lunchtime keynote speaker, Eric K. Ward, from the Western States Center, focused on why the integration and rights of immigrants and refugees is so central in this moment to protect and expand democracy. And how racialization, criminalization, and “othering” are impeding our ability to come together and why combatting racism is so key to immigrant integration. The key challenge that needs to be taken up is not just the immediate political tasks, but also the broader goal of building and intersecting the field so that immigrant rights advocates see racial justice as central and that anti-racist advocates fully embrace immigrant rights. Because it is important to recognize that the big issue is not really about immigration, but about race. Not on policy, but on the makeup of this country - on who has rights and who does not. The demographic changes and the anxieties around that change, is what is driving our policies. We need data to show the changes so we can build an inclusive, multiracial society.

**Closing Plenary**
The conference closed with an afternoon plenary on gearing up for what is ahead and how to build momentum in other areas with Maria Elena Durazo, UNITE HERE; Lisa Garcia Bedolla, UC Berkeley; Reverend Kelvin Sauls, Holman United Methodist Church/Co-Founder of BAJI; Rinku Sen, Race Forward; and Cristina Tzintzun, Jolt. Much ground was covered through the conversation that was moderated by CSII’s Manuel Pastor, however a couple themes emerged from the discussion. First, there was a lot of discussion on narrative. There was a call for more stories to be told about immigrants, their agency, how they’ve contributed, and how they are just normal, not remarkable, and not superheroes. Narratives can help break the bubbles that rooted in resentment and research can help with that by putting facts out into the public.

Second, one good thing about the Trump Administration is that it has allowed the movement to shift the old narrative around immigration to show that its true nature is about race. However, we will need to update our racial justice language and structures to keep up with the changing world and what is going on.

Third, personal transformation leads to collective power, and is a big factor in what made California a beacon. We still have many DACA recipients, TPS holders, and refugees who are living their lives in limbo, being tortured with uncertainty. Many people are still going through social/political hibernation – 2018 will be the year we can turn things around.
Finally, this conference throughout the day pointed to the need to generate accessible narratives, terminology and talking points for everyday Californians, immigrants, and those who are living the discrimination but do not have the words for it. It is our charge as academics, community organizers, civic leaders, policy makers, funders, and others to come together and find a path forward.