The Bold Idea Partnership

In 2017, Appleseed partnered with an organization called Princeton AlumniCorps to collaborate on the Bold Idea, a two-year initiative to promote network-based collaboration on immigration and forced migration issues. AlumniCorps shares a similar origin story to Appleseed, having been founded by Princeton alumni in 1989 with a mission to mobilize people, organizations, and networks for the public good (not unlike Appleseed’s founding by a group of Harvard Law alumni).

The objectives of our joint project were fourfold: (1) to convene, connect, and empower public interest and nonprofit organizations who use or are considering a network-based approach to address critical social issues; (2) to deepen collaborations seeking to welcome and protect immigrants in an era of increasing hostility and mobilize our specific networks toward this end; (3) to promote and expand Appleseed and AlumniCorps as effective models for this approach; and (4) to educate and mobilize philanthropic partners to fund networks and collaboratives.

Over the last two years, Appleseed and AlumniCorps have harnessed the knowledge, expertise, and resources of our respective networks to host convenings and panels featuring experts on immigration issues; produced and disseminated a wide variety of resources and materials; led a three-part webinar series; and fostered connections and knowledge sharing among Appleseed Center staff, direct service providers, foundation officers, volunteers, and others interested in immigration issues (to learn more about the project, please visit our website at www.AppleseedNetwork.org/BoldIdea).

Appleseed has also been able to use this project to build and strengthen the network of Appleseed Centers around the US and Mexico and demonstrate that diverse, high functioning networks can have a significant impact in addressing critical social issues. We have worked with an expert consultant to assess our network, develop best practices, and implement her recommendations to increase our effectiveness as a Network.

That effectiveness was on display at the Bold Idea Symposium, the final event in our two-year partnership with AlumniCorps that took place on May 14, 2019 at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice in Midtown Manhattan.

The Bold Idea Symposium: Leveraging Networks for Social Change

The Symposium featured local, state, national and international experts on critical immigration issues providing the latest updates in the field, funders sharing their work on immigration and networked organizations, and specialists in network development and growth sharing research on how to best leverage networked organizations. It provided an opportunity for over 80 attendees (including several from Appleseed Centers) to network and build relationships with each other, learn about using networks and coalitions to advance social justice, and gain insights on pushing for systemic change on immigration and forced migration issues.
KEYNOTE PANEL

After opening remarks, the Symposium continued with a keynote panel moderated by Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Assistant Professor of Classics at Princeton University and featuring speakers Sanaa Abrar, Advocacy Director at United We Dream; Steve K. Choi, Executive Director at the New York Immigration Coalition; and Laura Speer, Director of Strategy at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Ms. Speer initiated the keynote panel’s discussion of the significance of networks and coalitions for the purposes of mobilizing social change by discussing her involvement in the Annie E. Casey Foundation, an organization formed to protect the lives of children and families. Ms. Speer emphasized that, “no matter how good an organization is, they’re not going to be able to make good changes alone.” The network approach is valuable because it allows to organizations to rely on each other for help, funding, and other resources in times of rapid response. A key example she shared was a coalition effort led by two organizations, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), which jointly created The Protecting Immigrant Families Campaign (PIF). In 2018, the campaign generated popular opposition to the Trump Administration's public charge proposal with an initial goal to generate 100,000 public comments. By the end of the public comment period, more than 266,000 people and organizations submitted comments – the overwhelming majority of which opposed this proposal.

Mr. Choi continued to stress the value of coalitions by offering his experiences working as executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition. He described coalitions as “fierce, but fraught.” Coalitions are powerful because of their ability to bring together stakeholders from all over that are aligned behind a particular goal. However, Mr. Choi stressed the need to balance the ability of individual coalition members to rapidly mobilize in crisis situations with decision-making at the coalition level. He gave the example of the NY Immigration Coalition’s strong advocacy around the detention of immigrants at JFK Airport and its ability to quickly mobilize external activists; because of the urgency of the issue coalition members did not specifically weigh on whether to take action on this issue, but were then asked to participate.

The last panelist, Sanaa Abrar, ended the conversation by emphasizing how important network and coalition-building is to help raise the voices of people who otherwise might be left unheard. She discussed her experience working with United We Dream, a network made up of immigrant youth who are not policy experts but bring their lived experiences to the table. One of the major accomplishments of the United We Dream network was to make changes to the proposed DREAM Act in 2017 that would raise the age of eligible DACA recipients from 17 to 18, largely impacting many members of the network who had previously been ineligible for the program. This was a strong example of network administrators holding themselves...
The Using Networks to Drive Change Roundtable was moderated by Elisa Ortiz, Director of Network Collaboration at Appleseed and featured speakers Johanna Calle, Executive Director at the NJ Alliance for Immigrant Justice; Sandra Cordero, Director of Families Belong Together; and Elizabeth Lower-Basch, Director, Income and Work Supports at CLASP and Co-Chair, Protecting Immigrant Families Campaign.

The speakers shared their experiences with working in various types of coalitions and campaigns (including both “values” coalitions and “issue” coalitions) and shared challenges and suggestions for how to address them. Key to building successful coalitions is relationship building — getting to know each of your coalition partners individually if possible, figuring out what their needs and priorities are, sharing information with them, but also making sure that roles and responsibilities are clear. While action plans and strategic plans are helpful, the nature of this work is incredibly dynamic, so making sure that decision-making processes and shared values are established upfront will allow networks to be nimble as situations change.

The Media and Migration Roundtable was moderated by Sahand Keshavarz Rahbar, Bold Idea Fellow at Princeton AlumniCorps and featured speakers Adriana Diaz, a CBS News Correspondent; Abby Goldberg, Founder and President of Variant Strategies; Michael Kleiman, Founder and Executive Director of MediaTank; and Sonya Schwartz, Senior Policy Attorney at NILC and Co-Chair, Protecting Immigrant Families Campaign.

The speakers shared specific examples from their work in the realms of broadcast journalism, animated filmmaking, and advocacy campaigns to highlight the considerations and variables that go into play when using various forms of media to tell stories that inform, educate, and call viewers/listeners to action on immigration issues. The presentations included insights about the role of networks in both shaping and distributing stories and the role of social media platforms.

The Local Focus, National Reach Roundtable was moderated by Caryn Tomljanovich, Director of Programs and Strategy at Princeton AlumniCorps and featured speakers Adriana Abizadeh, Executive Director at the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund; Liora Danan, Chief of Staff at the NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and Cities for Action; and Liz Lempert, Mayor of Princeton Township.

accountable to their members and giving everyone a voice. Ms. Abrar also discussed the Defund Hate Campaign’s work to educate people on the human impact of what it means to cut funds to immigration enforcement and provide relief to all those facing aggressive and deadly immigration laws.
With a focus on Princeton (NJ), Mercer County (NJ), and New York City, this roundtable invited speakers to share their experiences working on immigration issues in a local context while also partnering up with other organizations through coalitions to effect collective impact on a geographically wider scale. The conversation included insights about the unique circumstances of working under the current federal administration, the capabilities and limits of municipal governments in protecting vulnerable immigrants, and the importance of celebrating victories, no matter how small, and supporting one another, especially in the face of stress and burnout.

Finally, the Health, Mental Health, and Migration Roundtable was moderated by Kimme Carlos, Operations Manager at Princeton AlumniCorps, and Founder & Executive Director, Urban Mental Health Alliance and featured speakers Claudia Calhoon, Senior Director of Immigrant Integration Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition; Cathy Motamed, Statewide Refugee Health Coordinator at the NJ Office for Refugees, IRC; Samantha Norris, Supervising Social Worker at Safe Passage Project; and Cleonie White, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist and Psychoanalyst.

The speakers shared their work to provide mental health services to immigrants, refugees, and asylees and shared some of the challenges they've faced including language barriers, stigma around discussion of mental health, lack of mapping to mental health services, and government systems that don’t take into account the needs of immigrants, particularly immigrant youth. They are all working to address these barriers by convening stakeholders, educating various communities, and developing relationships and trust with the immigrants they are serving.

The day wrapped up with closing thoughts from staff at Appleseed and AlumniCorps and provided an opportunity for participants to share their reactions to the day. Note: Video recordings of several sessions can be found on our YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/AppleseedNetwork/.

Next Steps and Future Symposia

The Bold Idea Symposium was an incredibly successful event that allowed Appleseed to build relationships with critical partner organizations and stakeholders in the immigration and forced migration space. It was so successful that we are already planning for another Symposium to take place in early 2020 in New York City (on a different topic). Stay tuned to our website: www.AppleseedNetwork.org or subscribe for our email list: http://bit.ly/AppleseedSubscribe to learn about the next Symposium and other Appleseed events.